

# DISINHIBITION AND TERRORISM

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## **ABSTRACT**

The problem of understanding how terrorists are psychologically enabled to undertake violence against other human beings is one that has not been adequately examined in past research on terrorism. Indeed, while much has been researched on discovering motivations for such acts, an examination and analysis of the loss of inhibitions as a significant factor in the overall process of becoming a terrorist has been somewhat overlooked. This thesis is an attempt to remedy this shortcoming in the literature, and therefore represents an inquiry into how the process of disinhibition relates to the overall process of terrorism. By examining a number of different factors theoretically and applying them to two contemporary cases of terrorism, this thesis aims to show that there are numerous disinhibitors in relation to acts of terrorism, and that, in some situations, these disinhibitors can relatively easily come into play.

# CHAPTER ONE:

## INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction:**

In early May of 2004, an Israeli woman and her four young daughters were suddenly attacked, shot and killed by two Palestinian militants while travelling in their car near the Gaza Strip ([www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com), May 2, 2004). The woman was eight months pregnant at the time and her daughters were aged eleven, nine, seven and two (Reuters UK, May 2, 2004). After reading or hearing about such a tragic, terrifying and seemingly incomprehensible act as this one, one immediate question comes to mind – how, psychologically, is a person able to attack and kill other human beings, be they men, women, old or young? This question needs to be seriously examined if the phenomenon of terrorism is to be sufficiently explained, understood, and appropriately countered.

This thesis aims to explain what psychological mechanisms allow a person to feel justified in undertaking violent acts against other people. In other words, it looks at what mechanisms enable people to remove or lower their inhibitions in order to act violently; and as such, a political psychology approach to analyse this problem will be the most appropriate and helpful. The structure of this thesis will take the form of

theory-based chapters, where included in each is an application of the particular theories to two illustrative cases of terrorism. An in-depth thesis outline explaining this further is articulated in the last section of this chapter. The findings of the thesis will be able to add a significant amount to the existing knowledge in the field of the psychology of terrorism because of the different perspective that a comprehensive understanding of disinhibition can offer. This is in turn due to the fact that the thesis focuses on investigating the role that inhibitions against violence play rather than analysing motivations for terrorism, which much of the literature tends to do currently.

The terrorism case mentioned at the beginning of this chapter points to two of the most frightening and confusing aspects of terrorism which are of relevance to this thesis: its indiscriminate as well as unpredictable nature. Seemingly, anyone can be targeted, and at any time. In reference to one of the two cases that are to be used as illustrations in this thesis, the IRA exemplify this in their infamous bombing campaign against Britain in 1939, when they were able to detonate a bomb in the middle of a busy street in Coventry that killed five people and injured approximately fifty others (Coogan, 1995, p.127). These factors, amongst others, raise many psychological questions about the terrorists themselves and terrorism as a phenomenon; for example, how do terrorists justify their violent actions? Are people who undertake these acts really ‘deranged’, mentally ill, or simply ‘evil’? This question has often been asked of suicide bombers; however, studies have shown that these kind of bombers as well as terrorists in general, despite being understood by some as “crazed cowards” (Atran, 2003a), display no abnormal psychology, and are not “crazed, cowardly, apathetic or asocial” (Atran, 2003b). In light of such evidence, this thesis considers its arguments largely from a situational standpoint on terrorism rather than from a purely personality-oriented approach.

### *Conceptual Clarifications: Defining Terrorism and Disinhibition*

What an act of terrorism is and therefore how it is to be defined is a central issue that has created much debate over at least the past two decades (Laqueur, 1987); indeed, the cliché “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” has been one of the most hotly contested phrases in the study of terrorism (Laqueur, 1987, p.7; Ganor,



1998, Marsella, 2004). Due to the concept of terrorism having become so subjective, a definition of it is extremely difficult to create and defend. Because of this, many definitions are either too vague, or far too subjective, to mean anything. An example of this definitional problem can be seen in the United States Department of State's characterization of terrorism, which defines the phenomenon as "politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents" ([www.fpc.state.gov/](http://www.fpc.state.gov/), 2001). Although admitted as too broad by the State Department itself, this definition runs into many other problems; for instance, the use of the word "non-combatant". Through the use of this term, attacks upon such targets as military personnel, and the USS Cole bombing in 2000, may not be strictly defined as terrorism due to the fact that these targets are essentially classed as combatant (Ganor, 1998; [www.fpc.state.gov/](http://www.fpc.state.gov/), 2001).

One other reason that terrorism is so hard to define is because it gives rise to so many questions; for example, can terrorism ever be a legitimate method of achieving an end? Linked to this, what differentiates terrorism from 'revolutionary violence' or a 'struggle for national liberation', or even guerrilla warfare? Terrorism needs to be defined because of such questions, as well as many others. Indeed, as Ganor (1998) points out, "without a definition of terrorism, it is impossible to formulate or enforce international agreements against terrorism". Furthermore, if there is no agreement on what terrorism is, "no responsibility can be imposed" on countries that support terrorist groups, "nor can steps be taken to combat terrorist organizations" (Ganor, 1998).

Adding to the difficulties of defining terrorism is recent research that has focussed on defining different types of terrorism as opposed to looking at terrorism in general. For example, Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin (2000) argue that during the mid to late 1990s a "new terrorism" surfaced. This new terrorism is principally religious in nature, has an "increasing lethality" in attacks, and is characterized by the "increasing technological and operational competence of terrorists" (Simon and Benjamin, 2000, p.66). The authors argue that this new terrorism can be distinguished from terrorism of previous years due to these factors, and that it requires a different response in order to counter it. Matthew Morgan (2004), too, analyses terrorism in this way, arguing that terrorism is now characterized by religious motivations, with less of a

concentration on political aims, and with more of a focus on “millennial visions of apocalypse and mass casualties” (p.29). The new kind of terrorism these scholars examine makes it difficult to define terrorism because of its resulting emphasis on examining terrorism in different stages or eras than as one phenomenon.

Despite research that argues for classifications and a variety of definitions for different types of terrorism, this thesis will nonetheless provide a general definition for terrorism that can be applied to both of the illustrative cases to be used. The definition that is to be used for the purposes of this thesis has been informed by the ideas and arguments of Paul Wilkinson (1974) and Boaz Ganor (1998).

Wilkinson emphasizes that terrorism is different from simple political violence due to such characteristics as the indiscriminate nature of the attack, the methods employed, and its apparent indifference to morality (1974, p.16). For example, he argues that, although terrorists “generally have a specific human ‘target’, whether individual or collective”, the attack by nature is indiscriminate because it does not distinguish between people of different gender, age, or status in society (p.13-14). This is apparently because no person has “inviolable rights” in the perpetrator’s rationale because terrorism “necessarily involves disregarding the rules and conventions of war” (ibid, p.14). Wilkinson also argues that terrorism is clearly distinct from other forms of political violence because of its “extreme and ruthlessly destructive methods” (p.15). These methods can and often do include genocide, physical beating, massacre, torture or harassment. Aside from its methods and indiscriminate nature, Wilkinson claims that what fundamentally distinguishes terrorism from other violent acts is its “features of amorality and antinomianism” (p.16). By this, Wilkinson asserts that terrorists either “profess indifference to existing moral codes or else claim exemption from all such obligations” (p.16-17). While in many cases those belonging to terrorist groups may not “claim exemption” from moral codes, much of the time they do “profess indifference” to them in favour of their own version of morality, as shown in later parts of this thesis.

Ganor (1998) focuses his definition of terrorism on three key aspects: the objective of the act, the nature of the targets, and the “essence” of the act. Terrorism, for Ganor, is thus about political aspirations, which are achieved through the targeting of civilians,

and are acts that are always undertaken by violent means. His definition, therefore, encompasses these three aspects - “terrorism is the intentional use of, or threat to use, violence against civilians or civilian targets, in order to attain political aims” (Ganor, 1998).

This thesis is concerned with terrorism specifically of a non-state nature, and as such its definition of terrorism is as follows: terrorism is the premeditated and deliberate use of violence against a civilian or a civilian population, with the intent of either killing or inflicting severe physical and psychological harm. An act of terrorism can be perpetrated by a person acting independently or on behalf of a group, and is undertaken in order to achieve some political goal or aspiration.

While somewhat broad, this definition is significant in that it reflects the nature of the current understanding of the phenomenon by the international community, as stated by a United Nations 2004 report on terrorism. This report stressed that any workable definition of what terrorism is needs to incorporate the fact that an act of terror is one that is undertaken to deliberately harm civilians and is political in its aims and objectives ([www.un.org/secureworld/report.pdf](http://www.un.org/secureworld/report.pdf), 2004).

Terrorism will be characterized in the above way because the definition encompasses the intentional aspect of terrorism, that is, the deliberate aim to harm, as well as the political nature of its goals and objectives, and the nature of the intended targets; these being civilian rather than military. Terrorism thus defined can be differentiated from guerrilla warfare, the other form of political violence with which it is most often confused. Guerrilla fighters “may have the exact same aims [as terrorists], but they choose different means to accomplish them” (Ganor, 1998). Simply put, guerrilla warfare is perpetrated against military targets and not civilian, as opposed to terrorism. The definition articulated therefore gives a clear and solid way to examine the two illustrative cases that are to be used in this thesis, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Palestinian suicide bombers.

Disinhibition is a psychological concept used to explain the process whereby a person’s inhibitions against acting or behaving in a certain way can become

significantly lowered. As such, it can be defined generally as a process that weakens and releases inhibitions so that a person acts in a way that they normally would not (Boakes and Halliday, 1972).

While a fine line exists between what constitutes a motivation and what constitutes a disinhibitor, the two concepts are able to be clearly differentiated in most cases. Essentially, a motivation provides the *push* to act, whereas a disinhibitor instead enables or frees the person, psychologically, to see out their motivation. For example, a person may be motivated to physically harm another person; however he or she does not actually harm them because they are constrained by, for instance, a sense of empathy for their victims or a fear of the consequences for their potential actions. In a differing situation, where the same person does not harbour any fears about the consequences of harming his or her victim or have any empathy for them, this may allow them to actually inflict harm upon their victim(s), as their inner constraints have been weakened or released. In such a situation, the person may or may not be aware of these inner constraints, yet they nonetheless have just as important an effect psychologically as a motivation to act.

### **Methodology:**

As this work deals with a large number of theoretical concepts and ideas with the aim of working toward a thorough understanding of the problem of terrorism, using a qualitative methodology seems the most appropriate way to approach this, especially given the time and resource constraints that are certain to affect the research. With this in mind, the historical/comparative analysis method has been chosen as the primary means of data collection and analysis. This is mainly because the thesis centres on sourcing and applying relevant social psychological theories of disinhibition to both the theory and practice of terrorism, and such a methodology is a more practical way to help add to the already existing knowledge within this particular field of research, as it focuses on analysing historical patterns and processes over a period of time using theory and records of history.

While a combination of several qualitative methods, including interviews and surveys, would perhaps be more ideal in researching the topic, a historical/comparative analytical method is better suited to this thesis given the difficulty in being able to undertake interviewing and surveys on this research topic as well as the time limitations attached to undertaking a Master's thesis.

The two illustrative cases of terrorism that are used in this thesis to demonstrate theoretical concepts were chosen out of a range of others for various reasons. Though similar in the way that both of these cases originated from nationalist aspirations, they will be useful to this thesis because of their differences, as they are very far apart geographically and in their methods and activities. The IRA, for example, have tried to achieve their goals through such tactics as targeted assassinations and bombings of civilian areas in Ireland and Britain (Coogan, 1995; O'Doherty, 1998), whereas Palestinian suicide bombers, while using similar tactics, have willingly killed themselves in their attempts to kill others, an aspect that sets them well apart from the IRA and many other terrorist organizations. Indeed, between 1993 and April 2003, approximately 250 Palestinians have either attempted or perpetrated suicide attacks against Israelis (Kimhi and Even, 2004). The IRA, while going through a major split in 1969 (Bell, 1970), has remained the major militant group in the Irish conflict; this differs to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where suicide bombers come from a number of differing groups, predominantly Palestine Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (Hoffman, 2003). In addition to these factors, while these cases owe their allegiance to different religions, they maintain political ideologies that are at times often strikingly similar, especially on the topics of nationhood and foreign 'occupiers' of their land.

The type of methodology that is used in this thesis is of course not without its drawbacks. For example, as a result of not undertaking primary research, such as conducting interviews, in the thesis, the research may ultimately be unable to add much to the existing knowledge on the subject. As such, without interviewing subjects to back up the theoretical material, the information on the illustrative cases thus also becomes limited to what is already in existence. However, this type of methodology is the most practical way to approach this topic because much of the research lies with an examination into past and present theoretical ideas about the

psychology of terrorism, and its relationship to actual terrorists and terrorist groups. In sum, despite the criticisms discussed above, a historical/comparative methodology is the most suitable approach for this thesis as it captures the essence of what the research is about – a theoretical analysis of a major past, present and future world problem.

### **Rationale:**

Turning now to the reasons for this study, the research question that this thesis is essentially centred around is: what mechanisms exist that allow a person to knowingly inflict violence upon another person? In addition to this important question, it also then becomes pertinent to ask to what extent is disinhibition an important factor in the psychology of terrorism as field of research? This thesis therefore has its grounding in investigating both of these questions, with emphasis on the first.

Disinhibition is a concept that has classically been used to research into and unearth factors behind mass violence. However, its application to terrorism has the potential to be just as important. Understanding how, psychologically, someone is able to perpetrate terrorist acts is as significant as understanding what pushes or motivates them to do so. Understanding the role of disinhibition in terrorism may also prove to be a key to more effective counter-terror initiatives because of the deeper psychological understandings it can offer. For example, an awareness of the role that dehumanization plays in releasing inhibitions to kill can potentially help to curb such processes. Also, understanding the effects of disinhibition can, for example, shed light on how terrorist organizations and groups are able to indoctrinate their members.

Because of the lack of literature available, and since most of the existing literature concentrates on violent acts other than terrorism, this thesis will be able to add a significant amount to the knowledge available on the psychology of terrorism because of the different viewpoint it offers, as mentioned previously. Because disinhibition

points to the origins of violent behaviour; that is, it examines what psychological mechanisms permit a person to feel justified in harming someone else, it is able to provide a greater understanding of how and why terrorist acts are perpetrated.

As this thesis is essentially theoretical in nature, the use of illustrative cases to apply the theories covered will add validity to the thesis and its conclusions. As discussed in the above section, the IRA and Palestinian suicide bombers have been chosen to fill this role. These two cases have been chosen instead of other terrorist groups and organizations not only because of their contemporary and historical relevance, but also because of their contrasting cultures, methods, and geographical distance. In addition, it seemed pertinent to choose cases that have a significant amount of information available about them, and in this case there was plenty of readily available information on the IRA and Palestinian suicide terrorists in comparison to many other terror groups and organizations.

### **Literature Review of the Psychology of Terrorism:**

One problem that has been the driving force behind much of the literature on the psychology of terrorism is discovering the degree to which psychology is a necessary aspect to understanding terrorism as a phenomenon (Reich, 1990). The available literature on the psychology of terrorism has mainly focused on motivations for terrorism with a lesser extent of analysis on the release of inhibitions (see, for example, Moghaddam and Marsella, 2004; Kressel, 1996; Reich, 1990; Laqueur, 1987). Interestingly, Marsella (2004) notes that psychologists did not take much of an interest in the psychology of terrorism up until September 11, 2001, after which research and literature on the topic began to grow significantly, and currently holds a very important place in the study of terrorism as a whole.

When examining motivations, most scholars concentrate on such factors as the perception of injustice or oppression, as well as the repercussions of feelings of hatred, revenge and retaliation. For instance, Kressel (1996) posits that “only when people view their situations as unacceptable and as the result of injustice will anger

prevail” (p.248). Kressel puts forth a list of twelve possible motivations for why people participate in terrorism, but stresses that this list is not exhaustive (p.259). Amongst this list are such motivations as being “committed to an ideology of hate”; wanting “revenge for real or imagined offenses”; or something as simple as having a “lack [of] awareness of the consequences of their actions” (p.259). Indeed, revenge has been classed as an important motivator of terrorist acts because of the fact that many “friends, fellow cadres from the would-be attacker’s organization, or relatives” have been killed by who potential terrorists would consider their enemy (Tal, 2002). An illustration of wanting revenge for real or imagined offenses can be seen through Sean MacStiofain, a former active and significant member of the IRA. When asked about why the IRA decided to take attacks out on English soil, MacStiofain replied, “to make sure that the establishment would see that they must pay dearly for the north of Ireland... [their] policies and the prison” (“The IRA and Sinn Fein”, 2004).

Other research has argued that religion is a “primary incentive” for undertaking terrorist acts because of the way in which some religious groups are able to manipulate notions such as jihad (Tal, 2002; Esposito, 2002). Indeed, religion can act as a motivator for violent acts in that defence of ‘religious truth’ may not only be seen as justifying violence but that it may also see violence as a duty – “to some believers, this undoubtedly entails killing as many enemies as possible [in order] to establish the superior justice of the right cause” (Larsson, 2004, p.112).

Despair and frustration, too, have been argued to act as important motivators. Citing such factors as “severe economic decline, closures, curfews, and roadblocks”, Tal (2002) argues that indoctrination of potential perpetrators of attacks is in many cases unnecessary because despair and frustration exist to such a high degree in some societies that not much else is needed to motivate people to join terrorist organizations. In illustration of this, Eyad El Sarraj, a Palestinian psychiatrist, argues that despair and “hopelessness” are potentially two of the biggest motivators for Palestinian suicide terrorism, maintaining that “desperation is a very powerful force... it propels people to actions or solutions that previously would have been unthinkable” (“Suicide Bombers”, 2002).



One approach that has been used in the literature is the argument that motivation for terrorist acts stems from a paranoid worldview: “many drawn to the path of terrorism have a paranoid disposition and find the externalising rhetoric attractive” (Robins and Post, 1997, p.103). The ‘us’ versus ‘them’ attitude is prevalent in this situation, where terrorists fight for what they assert is a “righteous cause against ‘them’, the corrupt establishment” (ibid, p.102). From a paranoid mindset, those undertaking acts of terror believe they are oppressed and that their would-be victims are the oppressors (ibid, p.102). This mindset can then lead to the potential terrorist psychologically separating themselves from an “empathic connection” with their “enemy” (ibid, p.104). Following from this, “with this psycho-logic, it becomes morally permissible, indeed morally imperative, to destroy those seen as representing the establishment, for they are the source of society’s (and the terrorist’s) problems” (ibid, p.104).

The frustration-aggression hypothesis (see Berkowitz, 1962) as an approach to understanding terrorist motivation has also been considered as important in the literature on the psychology of terrorism; however, its validity has been questioned by some (Laqueur, 1987, p.158-9). The frustration-aggression hypothesis essentially argues that frustration “produces an emotional state – anger – which heightens the probability of the occurrence of aggression” (Laqueur, 1987, p.158). This hypothesis, although a “relatively simple model and... in accordance with common sense”, has been criticised because of research that has indicated that “frustration did not invariably lead to aggression, which could occur without frustration, [and] that threat and insult could evoke more aggression than frustration” (Laqueur, p.159). Frustration-aggression theory has also been criticised on the grounds that it lacks any inclusion about the social psychology of hatred in its analysis (Wilkinson, 1974, p.127).

Apart from the general motivations of terrorism examined here, such as feelings of oppression and frustration, literature on the psychology of terrorism has also examined the release of inhibitions as an enabler of terrorism, but not to a great extent (see, for example, Beck, 2002, Bandura, 2004).

As previously stated, disinhibition is characterized in this thesis as the release of an inhibition, and will be described as a process that psychologically enables someone to

do something that they are normally inhibited from doing (Boakes and Halliday, 1972). For instance, if a person believes he or she will have no part, or at most a very insignificant part, in the harming or death of someone else, this may release their inhibitions for undertaking a violent act against them, as their perceived level of responsibility is low or non-existent (Bandura, 1990).

The literature on disinhibition seems to concentrate mainly on culture and the effect of belonging to a group (Crenshaw, 1988; Post, 1987; Bandura, 1990). Amongst others, belonging to a group allows a person to diffuse or displace responsibility for perpetrating a terrorist act (Bandura, 1990; 2004). Post, Sprinzak and Denny's (2003) work seems to add confirmation of the importance of group dynamics in perpetrating terrorist acts. For example, their analysis of their interviews with imprisoned Middle Eastern terrorists showed that, amongst other findings, the "fusion with the group seems to provide the necessary justification for their actions with an attendant loss of felt responsibility for the individual member – if the group says it is required and it is justified, then it is required and is justified. If an authority figure orders an action, then the action is justified". Belonging to a group has also been found to provide a sense of anonymity for a would-be terrorist (Diener, 1977).

In examining culture, many scholars, especially recently, have tended to examine the effect of religion (Esposito, 2002; Rapoport, 1987), and how undertaking an act "in the name of God" is able to act as a disinhibitor to violence (Robins and Post, 1997; Beck, 2002). There are many examples of this to be found amongst Palestinian suicide bombers. For instance, Gaza's second suicide bomber said in his farewell tape, in response to his friend's attack earlier that year, "when I heard the news of your martyrdom, God was telling me at that moment what to do... I am getting ready, Ali. I am preparing to meet you in heaven" (Andoni, 1997). Other scholars have analysed the extent to which cultural ideologies and socialization into a culture are able to release inhibitions. For example, Zimbardo (1999) argues that socialization is key in the creation of a state or nation's enemy, especially if the socialization process is begun early in an individual's life.

Aside from culture and the effect of the group upon an individual, a large amount of the existing literature analyses dehumanization; that is, how a person can come to

view another person or group of people as subhuman or nonhuman. Dehumanization can be achieved through such means as depicting the enemy as an aggressor, as a “beast, reptile, insect, [or] germ”, or even a “barbarian” (Keen, 1986). Through dehumanization, there is high potential for a person to “kill without guilt” or “slaughter without shame” (Keen, 1986). To give one example, members of the IRA have at times referred to the British as, for instance, “the aggressor in Ireland...morally and inescapably responsible for all loss of life and bloodshed in this Irish conflict” (MacStiofain, 1975, p.vii-viii) and have often depicted their enemy in cartoons as aggressive and bloodthirsty (Keen, 1986). Recent research has shown that dehumanization has a higher chance of taking place if “the target group can be readily identified as a separate category of people belonging to a distinct racial, ethnic, religious or political group that the perpetrators regard as inferior or threatening” (Waller, 2002, p.245). Dehumanization has been theorized to be very important when trying to understand how a person is psychologically capable of killing others for a number of reasons. For example, Waller (2002) argues that dehumanization “ensures a degree of psychological distance” that is necessary between a potential perpetrator and victim, and it also is able to justify and rationalize “extraordinary evil” (p.248-249). Dehumanization is able to justify extreme violence because it emphasizes that the potential victims are such a great threat to the potential perpetrators, and in some cases even deserve to be destroyed, and at any cost (Waller, 2002). A more extensive literature review on the disinhibition literature and its relation to terrorism is examined and discussed in the next chapter.

### **Backgrounds of Illustrative Cases:**

#### *The Irish Republican Army (IRA)*

The IRA was formed from a collection of Irish political and military groups during the Anglo-Irish conflict of 1919 (Smith, 1995, p.xiv). During the early years of the IRA, the organization undertook mostly guerrilla-type operations that included such targets as soldiers, police and police barracks (Coogan, 1995, p.26). This early campaign took the lives of an estimated 600 people. Before the IRA’s internal split in

1969, the organization was well known for such attacks as the bombing of Britain campaign in 1939 (Bell, 1970). This bombing campaign in Britain tragically resulted in a significant amount of civilian loss of life and injury. In London, targets such as train stations and power stations were attacked; and in Liverpool, a jail was the target of a bombing (Bell, 1970, p.188-189). The most shocking of these attacks occurred in August of 1939, in Coventry. In this incident, a bomb was intentionally left on a bicycle outside a shop in a busy street, and was responsible for killing five people – including an elderly man and a teenage boy – and injuring around fifty others (Coogan, 1995, p.127).

As well as attacks on buildings in civilian areas, military targets, and groups of civilians, the IRA is well known for assassinations on particular people; for example, that of Sir Henry Wilson in June of 1922. Wilson was a key advisor militarily to the government in Northern Ireland, and had long been disliked by the IRA (Coogan, 1995, p.127).

Despite these attacks and assassinations, it was not until the internal split in the organization in 1969 that the IRA began more frequent and terrifying violent attacks against civilians. The IRA's internal split was in response to disagreement over whether to recognize the existence of the two Irish governments and that of Westminster (Bell, 1970, p.430). The organization broke into two factions following this heated issue, these being the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA (commonly known as the 'Provos' or PIRA). The Provisional IRA decided that the IRA's goal should still be a free and united Ireland without British interference in the Northern counties, and were therefore against recognition of two Irish governments. Implicit in the Provisionals' existence was the belief that a militarily active Army was needed for the "eventual achievement of the full political, social, economic and cultural freedom of Ireland", whereas the Official IRA focussed more on what they termed a "political policy" for achieving their aims for Ireland through a socialist/Marxist philosophy (Bell, 1970, p.430-1). The Provisional IRA has, over time, become known as merely the IRA, while the Official IRA has faded into the background of Irish politics.

Since the formation of the Provisional IRA, the group have conducted terrorist operations in Ireland and England, taking approximately 1800 lives in the process,

nearly a third of these being civilian (Lavery, 2002). One of the most tragic attacks to take place occurred in 1972 in the middle of Belfast. Twenty-two bombs were detonated in what was later called “Bloody Friday”. This resulted in the deaths of nine people and injured a hundred and thirty (Lavery, 2002).

In the past ten years, however, the IRA has agreed to two ceasefires, the first one put in place in 1994. Unfortunately, this ceasefire only lasted until February of 1996, when the IRA and Northern Irish loyalists resumed their campaigns against each other (O’Doherty, 1998, p.89). In 1997, another ceasefire was called for and is still in place, with various peace agreements made and talks continuing on the IRA’s disarmament. Since this ceasefire, the IRA has even published a public apology – despite it being criticised by some as “half-hearted” – to the “families of non-combatants” that it has killed during the past thirty years of violence (Lavery, 2002). Despite this, an unaffiliated splinter group calling themselves the Real IRA have kept up a campaign of violence, one notable attack of theirs being the Omagh bombing of 1998 in which twenty-nine people were killed (Burns, 1999).

### *Palestinian Suicide Bombers*

The use of suicide bombing by Palestinians is a reasonably recent phenomenon, only beginning to occur in the early to mid 1990s (see Kimhi and Even, 2004; Esposito, 2002). The main three groups that perpetrate this kind of attack are Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (a militant wing of the Fatah organization). Palestine Islamic Jihad and Hamas were established in Palestinian areas in the late 1980’s, Hamas being an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which originated in Egypt (Esposito, 2002, p.94-95).

Hamas claims that the major turning point in its strategy towards Israel occurred very early in 1994. In February of that year, an Israeli extremist – Dr Baruch Goldstein – entered a mosque in Hebron and shot dead almost thirty Muslim worshippers (Milton-Edwards, 1996, p.166). Hamas instituted its first suicide attack, followed closely by an attack by Palestine Islamic Jihad, in April of 1994 (Milton-Edwards,

1996, p.166-7). This attack by Hamas killed seven Israelis, and was asserted as revenge for Goldstein's attack (Esposito, 2002, p.98-99).

A relatively perplexing aspect of suicide bombing, and one which has surprised many, is its recent incorporation of women as suicide attackers, a change from earlier strategy where men were the only ones allowed to undertake such an act (Victor, 2003, p.70). Wafa Idris, a Palestinian woman from the Al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah, became the first woman suicide bomber on January 27, 2002, when she blew herself up in Jerusalem, killing one person and injuring 131 (Victor, 2003, p.20). In 2003, three other women also followed Wafa's lead and died as suicide bombers (Victor, 2003, p.54). The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade has even opened special "squads" in the name of Wafa Idris specifically for women who want to become suicide bombers (Luft, 2002). Indeed, groups with a more secular orientation, such as the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, have been the ones able to attract women to become suicide bombers because of the religious restrictions that Islamist groups place on the participation of women in times of war or conflict (Schweitzer, 2000).

Between 1994 and 2002, well over one hundred Palestinians have become suicide bombers, and between January and April of 2002 alone, nine suicide attacks were perpetrated, killing thirty-three people and injuring 464 (Hoffman, 2003). Throughout the time of its use in Israeli and Palestinian areas, members of Palestinian extremist groups have attempted over 250 suicide attacks, a high proportion of these being undertaken by Hamas (Kimhi and Even, 2004). Although a ceasefire – albeit an extremely fragile one – was put in place in 2005 between the Palestinians and Israel, tensions still remain very high between the two communities, with bursts of violence still occasionally breaking out between them.

### **Thesis Outline:**

While the current chapter provides a broad overview of the problem of terrorism and its relation to this thesis, the next chapter focuses on the concept of disinhibition as an

aspect of the psychology of terrorism. It begins with an examination of previous and current literature on this subject, and looks in depth at the effects of dehumanization, cultural sanctioning of violence, religion, and the influence of the terrorist group upon an individual. Following from this review, the chapter also lays out a discussion of how disinhibition is related to the study of terrorism, and emphasizes Bandura's (1990) model of self-regulating influences and terrorist behaviour. Lastly, the chapter presents an analysis of how the process of disinhibition can be controlled by self-regulation; in other words, it discusses the ways in which inhibitions against violence may be put in place or maintained.

The third chapter of the thesis concentrates on how inhibitions against killing are released through the process of dehumanization, and looks also at how feelings of hate can also fuel a process of disinhibition. It begins, however, with an examination of how one of the main inhibitors of violence, empathy, is able to be easily overcome. For instance, it considers how attributing blame to one's enemies can remove feelings of empathy and compassion toward intended victims of terrorism, thus making it that much easier to commit acts of violence against them. Throughout this chapter, examples from the two illustrative case studies will supply real-world evidence of the theoretical material.

The next chapter provides a discussion of and investigation into the effect that belonging to a culture has on an individual. Because cultural sanctioning plays such a large role in releasing inhibitions in general, this chapter looks at this issue through an analysis of the effects that socialization, education, cultural myths and cultural ideologies have on encouraging aggressive and violent behaviour. It builds on the previous chapter in the way that it points out how cultures can facilitate such processes as dehumanization of other groups, either through promoting certain ideologies or through socialization. The illustrative cases are of much significance in this chapter because they clearly demonstrate how cultural sanctioning can help to release inhibitions against terrorism.

Following from this, the fifth chapter devotes itself to understanding the role that religion plays in disinhibiting terrorism. While this is related to culture in many cases, religion will be considered as a separate chapter because of its significance to

terrorism, especially over the past few decades. In addition, religion also warrants a separate chapter because of its ability on its own, irrespective of culture in many instances, to affect inhibitions against violence. As well as an examination of the psychology of religion in relation to the release of inhibitions, and the role it plays in the two illustrative cases, the chapter begins with a description of the prevalence of religion in terrorism and a discussion of the nature of the relationship between culture and religion.

The sixth chapter brings many of the aspects of the third, fourth, and fifth chapters together as it centres on an analysis of group dynamics, deindividuation, and obedience to authority. It therefore discusses group cohesion, collective decision-making and uniformity of ideas, as well as diffusion and displacement of responsibility and the dynamics of obeying an authority. The IRA and Palestinian terror organizations are of much interest in this chapter because they show the ease with which groups can help to release an individual's inhibitions against violent behaviour.

The last and concluding chapter of this thesis draws the main points from chapters three through six together and from this essentially seeks to offer a theoretical model that shows the significance of disinhibition in psychologically allowing someone to participate in terrorism. This model will be drawn from the arguments and conclusions of the previous chapters, and will be able to act as a general model for terrorism, not just for particular types of terrorism and terrorist groups. Aside from this model, the chapter also notes any implications of the thesis for further research in the field of the psychology of terrorism as a whole.



## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **THE CONCEPT OF DISINHIBITION**

Disinhibition, as defined previously, is the process whereby an inhibition a person has becomes sufficiently weakened so that he or she acts in a way that they normally do not. This thesis is concerned with inhibitions on the subject of aggressive or violent behaviour, and as such this chapter focuses on this aspect of disinhibition. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the available literature concerning the role of disinhibition in terrorism is not vast. This is because most of the disinhibition literature relating to violent behaviour focuses on acts of large-scale violence such as genocide as well as behaviour in war, and because much of the terrorism literature focuses on motivations for terrorism rather than inhibiting or disinhibiting mechanisms. However, much of the existing literature on disinhibition and violence can be applied to terrorism because the theories involve the psychology behind how a person becomes able to kill or seriously injure someone else. The literature review in this chapter focuses on the themes that are relevant to this thesis, and it will therefore review research on dehumanization, culture and belief system, religion, and the effect of a group upon an individual.

## **Literature Review**

Within the existing literature, a significant amount of research focuses on the effect of dehumanization. Dehumanization, as briefly examined in chapter one, is a process whereby a person is categorized by others as either subhuman; for example, a kind of animal, or inhuman; for example a monster (Waller, 2002, p.245). It is an important process as it is able to cultivate different ways of thinking about and perceiving others, with one of the main consequences of this way of thinking being that “people enlist moral justifications for punitive conduct directed toward individuals who have been deprived of humanness, but they disavow punitive actions and condemn them on moral grounds toward individuals depicted in humanized terms” (Bandura et al., 1996). Many experiments have been undertaken to analyse whether dehumanization has a significant effect on aggressive behaviour, arguably the most famous of these being Bandura’s 1975 experiments. In these experiments, the targets of aggressive behaviour were characterized by the experimenters in either “humanized, neutral, or dehumanized terms” to the participants (Bandura, 1975, p.256). The experiments succeeded in showing that when people are characterized as non-human or subhuman, a person’s propensity for aggressive behaviour against them increases substantially (ibid, p.266). This experiment also found that dehumanization is “especially conducive” to aggressive behaviour when some level of diffusion of responsibility exists for the action and its consequences (ibid, p.266).

Earlier research on dehumanization has, amongst other findings, pointed to some of the conditions under which the process of dehumanizing others can take place. For example, Kelman (1973) argues that if a person is accorded “identity” and “community” there is a higher probability that they will not be dehumanized. For Kelman, according someone identity means to see them as an individual, “independent and distinguishable from others”, and according a person with community means to see them as a “part of an interconnected network of individuals” (1973, p.49). More recent research on dehumanization has indicated, as outlined in the first chapter, that the process of dehumanization has a higher tendency to take place when a group of people are viewed as completely separate or distinct by another

group of people, as well as when they are perceived to be either threatening or inferior (Waller, 2002).

Aside from dehumanization, aspects of a society's culture and its belief system can also play a significant role in releasing inhibitions to kill. For example, in the case of suicide terrorism at least, cultural factors are able to substantially affect behaviour by setting norms about if and when a person is permitted to commit suicide, as well as by "influencing people's concepts and expectations" about what will happen to them after death (Merari, 1990, p.197). Indeed, cultures often also lay the ground rules for their members on matters such as when violence may be approved, as well as who it is justified against. Interestingly, Baumeister (1999) is careful to point out that in many cases it is not necessary for a culture to directly promote violent behaviour – "all the culture has to do is stop restraining [violent tendencies], and these tendencies will emerge" (p.276-277). However, as Marsella (2004) notes about the relationship between culture and terror, a "culturally constructed reality" is able to provide the necessary evidence for a terrorist or potential terrorist's beliefs about violence and participating in terrorism, such that the person gradually gains a "sense of righteousness" and moral justification for harming others (p.42).

A large amount of the literature on culture as a disinhibitor of violence explores the repercussions of historical cultural myths and cultural ideologies on a nation or society (Hirsch, 1985; Merari, 1990). Much of the research on this aspect of culture has been examined in light of the Nazi era in Germany before and during World War II. The historical cultural myths, for example about the history, superiority and destiny of the Aryan race, "functioned effectively" in dehumanizing the Jews and justifying their genocide (Hirsch, 1985, p.45). Indeed, the language that is used in portraying cultural myths and ideologies become "powerful cultural weapons" because of the result they are able to achieve on members of a society (p.46-47). However, Hirsch (1985) points out that cultural myths and their effects on a nation take place over a gradual period of time before becoming "embedded" within a culture (p.47).

Closely associated with cultural myths and ideologies is the process of socialization, the effect of propaganda, and the dynamics and effect of the education system on a

society. Socialization “shape[s] the values and ideas of the next generation” (Zimbardo, 1999), and has been shown to be a particularly effective way for those in power to “spread their ideas and agendas across generations to create a youth that will fight and die for their cause” (Zimbardo, 1999). Earlier research on this topic has also shown that aggression can at times be linked to socialization. For example, Bandura (1973) argues that socialization into a culture is able to have a significant effect on the level of aggressive behaviour on the members of that society. To illustrate this, Bandura points to previous studies on socialization and aggression that account for “markedly different characteristics” between Native American tribes. For instance, these studies noted that Comanche and Apache tribes used socialization methods that “raised their children to be warriors”, while tribes such as the Hopi employed socialization practices that “reared children with gentle dispositions” (Bandura, 1973, p.112). Indeed, Moghaddam (2004) also argues that the socialization of particular political messages into the general populace can often serve to promote those messages as significant cultural values, which in turn bolsters groups within that society that had already held the same value. In discussing martyrdom, Moghaddam notes that much of the terrorism in the Algerian war of independence was made possible because the value of sacrifice was so highly culturally sanctioned by much of the nation (2004, p.114-115).

The examination of education practices in different societies has also received some attention in the literature. Whether at school or within the family, education is a key aspect in creating a negative image of the ‘enemy’ (Zimbardo, 1999). In this respect, much of the literature focuses on the Nazi use of education, especially in schools. For example, textbooks distributed during the Nazi era aligned Jews with the devil, described them as extremely ugly, and claimed they were inferior to the ‘noble Aryan’ (Zimbardo, 1999), while the textbook given to Nazi youth contained twelve commandments which included the necessity of obeying authority at all times, as “the leader is always right” (Waller, 2002, p.182). Socialization and cultural belief systems have also been understood in the literature as self-perpetuating; once they become “institutionalised with authorized sanctions” they are able to affect attitudes and beliefs in a society well after the “historical determinants” of such beliefs and attitudes have ceased to exist (Bandura, 1973, p.112).

Strongly related to culture is the effect religion may have on aggressive behaviour. In the study of terrorism, religion has been examined in terms of its ability to be a motivator of violence as well as a disinhibitor (Esposito, 2002; Robins and Post, 1997). Although many scholars have considered religion only as a part of culture (for example, Merari, 1990), this thesis argues that it is such an important and complex concept that it will be considered separately from, although still complementary to, culture as a whole.

One theme that the existing literature considers is how religion is able to polarize groups of people or their beliefs in such terms as good versus bad or Satan versus Allah or God (Beck, 2002). Characterized in this way, religion can act as a disinhibitor because potential aggressors can frame their violent acts as being undertaken for a 'higher purpose'; in other words, in the name of God. This justification is one of the strongest ways to make inhibitions against killing or harming less effective at restraining behaviour (Beck, 2002). Indeed, as Ranstorp (1996) argues, "religions have gradually served to define the causes and the enemies as well as the means, methods and timing of the violence itself".

Related to this, much of the existing literature also examines the way in which religion is able to legitimate particular causes by providing people with a sense of divinity or righteousness about the group to which they belong (Hirsch, 1985). In this way, religion can be used to rationalise acts of violence because, from the viewpoint of the perpetrator(s), "after all, if you are descended from, or inspired and protected by gods, your actions are not questionable because they are not merely normal human acts" (Hirsch, 1985, p.44).

Another theme prevalent in the literature is how religious leaders, as well as religious followers generally, are able to manipulate or distort religious doctrines so that their interpretations of particular duties, obligations or commandments within their religion may deviate from the usually accepted understandings (Esposito, 2002). For example, Esposito (2002) refers to passages from the Koran, such as "if you are killed in the cause of God or you die, the forgiveness and mercy of God are better than all that you amass" (p.69) as illustrations of how easily people are able to interpret religion differently to justify acts of terrorism. For example, some may see this as meaning

that suicide attacks are sanctioned if not even honourable practices, or that they at least are a stepping stone to being in God's favour, as the phrase "killed in the cause of God" can be manipulated into including acts of suicide terror if such actions are promoted as divine. Valenty (2004), as well as many other scholars, points out that a basic reading of the Koran actually shows that living for Islam is better than dying for it, and any other reading of it amounts to a "clear misinterpretation of Koranic principles" (p.17).

Religion can also contribute to the dehumanization process in the way that it is able to negatively characterize other religions and those who belong to it – for example, Hirsch (1985) argues that Martin Luther's depiction of the Jews as, amongst other things, "bloodthirsty hounds", helped to dehumanize them and provide a religious justification for their harm (p.45).

So far this review of the literature has encompassed three out of the four themes that this thesis examines: dehumanization, culture and belief system, and religion. The last section of this review focuses on some of the psychological effects of an individual belonging to a group, and considers such factors as group dynamics and deindividuation, as well as why many individuals obey an authority when it comes to perpetrating or helping to perpetrate violent acts against other human beings.

Group dynamics and the effects that a leader may have on the thoughts and actions of an individual are subjects that have received much attention in the literature (Kelman and Hamilton, 1989; Zimbardo, 1999). In examining group dynamics, much research has focuses on how an individual is able to submerge their individual identity into that of a group. For example, Staub (1999) argues that individuals join groups for "identity and connection", and that in turn, groups "provide a new understanding of reality" (p.182). Staub also argues that people join groups in the first place because of "psychological reactions" to living under difficult life conditions (p.182); however, like other scholars, stresses that group violence "evolves over time... the personality of individuals, social norms, institutions, and culture change in ways that make... violence more likely" (p.182).

Like other groups, the dynamics of terrorist groups essentially enable members to feel justified in any actions they undertake, while providing “a sense of belonging, a feeling of self-importance, and a new belief system that defines... the group’s goals as of paramount importance” (Hudson, 1999).

The concept of deindividuation within a group setting has also been widely researched. Deindividuation “refers to a state of relative anonymity in which a person cannot be identified as a particular individual but only as a group member” (Waller, 2002, p.216). Recent research on deindividuation seems to affirm earlier research in that it has found that when a person feels anonymous, and views their victim as anonymous, such a situation often “facilitate[s] aggression” (Zimbardo, 1999). Deindividuation, like dehumanization, can be a gradual process, whereby certain conditions are able to make it more likely to happen. For example, Zimbardo (1999) describes five conditions that he argues help to bring about deindividuation. These are: firstly, remove a person’s “sense of uniqueness”; secondly, put them in a group; third, put them in uniforms; fourth, if possible disguise them; and fifth, “reduce their information processing, and cognitive functioning capacities, by encouraging emotional, physical, high intensity responding and by altering their state of consciousness through... immersion in present-oriented activities” (Zimbardo, 1999).

Paradoxically, one school of thought sees deindividuation as a cause of uninhibited behaviour, whereas the other sees it as a result of such behaviour (Diener, 1977, p.145). Diener (1977) argues that anonymity “may at times produce an internal deindividuated state but this evidence is thus far indirect” (p.147). However, Diener points to earlier research that shows that anonymity does produce unrestrained behaviour in the form of aggression. For example, a 1970 experiment, in which the group behaviour of university students was analysed, found that a deindividuated state did have a strong relation to aggressive behaviour, and it also found that once in a deindividuated state, the participants “were less discriminating in their aggression level toward [perceived] ‘nasty’ and ‘nice’ victims” (Zimbardo, 1970; cited in Diener, 1977, p.147). As well as anonymity, other factors, such as ‘altered responsibility’, also seem to have a bearing on bringing about deindividuation; however, not too such a substantial degree as anonymity. For example, Diener (1977) argues that “no significant relation emerged” during a study on the subject in 1975, and that his own

as well as others' findings may indicate that "altered feelings of responsibility may be a result of deindividuation and not a cause of it" (p.149).

Equally as important as group dynamics, obedience to authority is also a significant factor in releasing inhibitions to kill or harm others (Milgrim, 1974; Kelman, 1973; Zimbardo, 1999). An authority is able to provide legitimacy to a group's thoughts and behaviours (Kelman, 1973, p.39) while also providing a "different kind of morality" that can ignore the normal moral principles that usually "govern human relationships" (p.39). As Bandura et al. (1996) note, "when everyone is responsible, no one really feels responsible... people behave more cruelly under group responsibility than when they hold themselves personally accountable for their actions", as belonging to a group allows a person to either diffuse or displace responsibility away from him or herself personally (p.366). One of the most often cited pieces of research on obedience to authority and its effects on violent behaviour is Stanley Milgrim's obedience experiments (Berkowitz, 1999; Zimbardo, 1999). In Milgrim's experiments, randomly-chosen participants were told they – as the 'teacher' – were to give their 'student' electric shocks, stronger the more mistakes they made, when or if any errors on the student's behalf were made in a word association test (Zimbardo, 1999). Even after the shocks were so high that the students were "yelling and screaming" (Zimbardo, 1999), sixty-five percent of the teachers persevered in their task, at the request of the experimenter, shocking the student to the highest voltage possible (Milgrim, 1974), demonstrating that obedience to authority can indeed significantly affect a number of inhibitions against harming others.

This review of the literature has focussed on dehumanization, culture and cultural sanctioning, religion, and finally the fusing of the individual with the group. The available literature has proved to be valuable to this thesis in that it provides both theoretical and empirical evidence for the arguments that are presented in the following chapters. Influential scholars such as Bandura and Zimbardo, as well as experiments such as those by Stanley Milgrim, are important to the theoretical base of this thesis, and inform a significant part of this work. Despite the importance of such scholars, one gap in the literature remains – much of the disinhibition literature tends to be researched and applied to violent behaviour other than terrorism. For example,



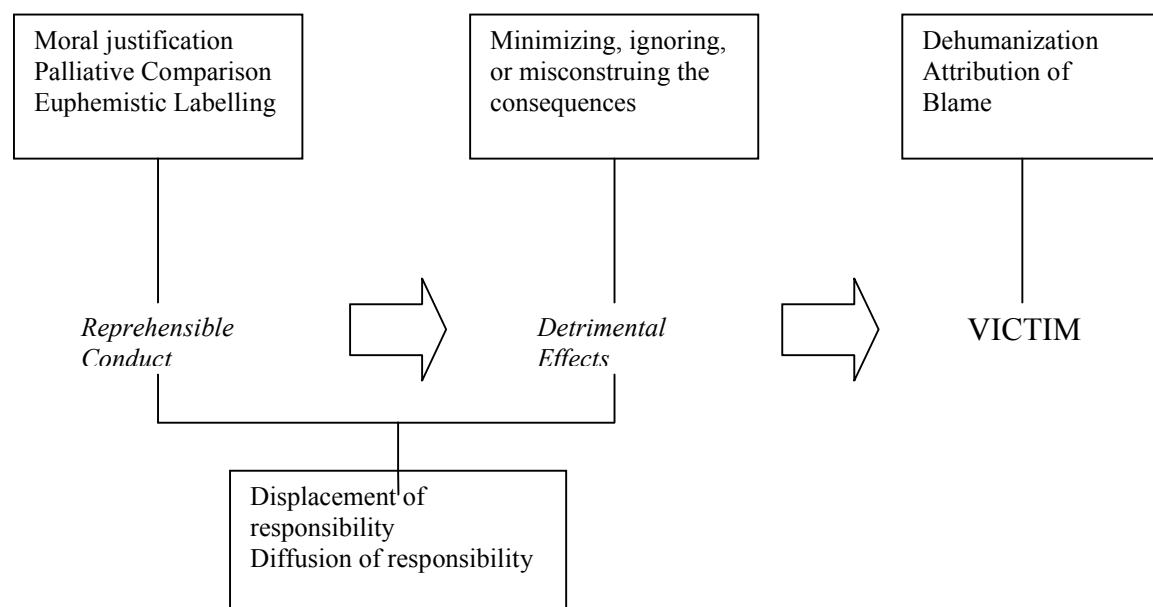
Hirsch (1985) applies his work to instances of mass murder, and mostly focuses on the Nazi extermination of the Jews; Kelman (1973; 1989) applies his work to what he labels “sanctioned massacres” – instances where soldiers, or those part of paramilitary groups, carry out excess violence; and Zimbardo (1999) focuses on the Holocaust and wartime violence. In spite of this, these works are still able to be applied to this thesis, because, as is demonstrated in the following chapters, much of the psychology involved in harming other people is the same for terrorists and terrorist groups as it is for wartime violence and other forms of political violence that involve the harming or killing of others.

### **Connecting Disinhibition with Terrorism**

As argued in the first chapter, an understanding of the psychological mechanisms that allow people to overcome inhibitions to harm other people is just as important as understanding the motivations behind these acts. Bandura (1990; 2004) has been an important scholar in explaining the link between disinhibitory processes and terrorism.

Bandura’s (1990; 2004) model consists of a description and analysis of eight psychological mechanisms through which disinhibition of aggression can occur. He argues that although “these psychosocial mechanisms of moral disengagement have been examined most intensely in relation to political and military violence”, the mechanisms examined in his model “operate in everyday situations in which decent people routinely perform activities that further their interests but have injurious human effects” (Bandura, 1990, p.162). The model, which in Bandura’s earlier works had been applied to aggressive behaviour generally (see, for example, Bandura, 1973), can also be applied to terrorism because terrorist acts require “more powerful machinations of moral disengagement” (Bandura, 1990, p.162-163) than other forms of political violence such as guerrilla warfare.

*Figure 1: Bandura's Self-Regulation Process*



The eight mechanisms of what Bandura terms moral disengagement are (as shown above): moral justification; palliative (or advantageous) comparison, in which a perpetrator may rationalize their act as legitimate by comparing it with an act far worse than their own; euphemistic labelling of a violent act; distorting the consequences of a violent action; dehumanization of the victim(s); attribution of blame to the victim, displacement of responsibility; and diffusion of responsibility.

These mechanisms do not “instantly transform a considerate person into a ruthless one who purposely goes out to kill other human beings. Terrorist behaviour evolves through extensive training in moral disengagement and terrorist prowess... The various disengagement practices form an integral part of the training” (Bandura, 1990, p.185-186). In addition, Bandura also states that “escalative self-disinhibition is accelerated if violent courses of action are presented as serving a moral imperative and the targeted people are divested of human qualities” (1990, p.186).

As well as Bandura, Beck (2002) also applies disinhibition to terrorist acts, arguing that “built into the whole system of idealized hate is the notion that violence against certain individuals is desirable – even ennobling”. Beck argues that this factor is

prevalent in terrorism, as much of the terrorist acts that have taken place in the past few years at least have been perpetrated under religious guises (2002). Indeed, many recent justifications for terrorism have been phrased in such terms as “I am doing this for God” or “I am doing this in the name of God” (Beck, 2002). Beck also argues along the same lines as Bandura in that he points out that disinhibition takes place as a gradual process rather than merely occurring ‘overnight’.

So far this chapter has presented a literature review of the themes and factors that this thesis focuses on in the following chapters, and has presented an argument for the way in which the process and theory of disinhibition is related to understanding the psychology behind acts of terrorism. The next part of this chapter focuses on an interesting and theoretically valuable aspect of disinhibition – what factors have the potential to control the disinhibitory process.

### **Controlling Disinhibitory Processes:**

“We all know that not everybody who is angered punches an antagonist in the mouth or shoots up a restaurant. No matter how strong, the urge is subject to restraint” (Beck, 2002). With this statement in mind, the central question for this section is: what mechanisms are able to keep inhibitions against violent behaviour in place? Following from this, why do some people react to certain situations with aggression and violence while others do not? Self-regulation of aggressive behaviour has been analysed in the literature in terms of such themes as empathy and the fear of punishment (Bandura, 1990; Miller and Eisenberg, 1988). This section of the thesis concentrates on how disinhibitory processes are controlled through such factors as individual morality, empathy and compassion, and the fear of the consequences of perpetrating a violent act against another person or people.

Individual moral codes, acting as “self-censuring restraints” (Bandura, 1990, p.164), are one factor that may inhibit someone from perpetrating violent acts against others.

A person's sense of morality is developed through socialization by "direct tuition, evaluative social reaction's to one's conduct, and exposure to the self-evaluative standards modelled by others" (Bandura et al, 1996). Once the construction of a moral code is complete, the code acts as a "guide and deterrent" of behaviour because "people regulate their actions by the consequences they apply to themselves" (Bandura et al., 1996). Indeed, as Beck (1999) notes, "we are generally pleased with ourselves when we live up to our ideal self-image, and displeased when we deviate from it... we make a considered decision to control a hostile impulse, not because of shame, guilt, anxiety or self-criticalness, but because we know it is personally unacceptable" (p.20).

A person's moral standards are kept in place by what some scholars title a "self-regulatory system" (Bandura et al., 1996). This system, although it does not "create an invariant control system within a person", allows people to "behave in accordance with their moral standards" (Bandura et al., 1996), and works through three sub-functions; these being the self-monitoring function, the judgemental function, and the self-reactive function. According to Bandura et al. (1996), the system operates thus:

Self monitoring of one's conduct is the first step toward exercising control over it. Action gives rise to self-reactions through a judgemental function in which conduct is evaluated against internal standards and situational circumstances. Moral judgement sets the occasion for self-reactive influence. People get themselves to behave in accordance with their moral standards through anticipatory positive and negative self-reactions for different courses of action.

Beck (1999) also considers a biological approach to understanding the effectiveness of morality on self-regulation, stating that some of the literature suggests that "evolutionary pressures have helped to develop socially desirable characteristics. There seems to be an innate program that reinforces sociable behaviour" (p.24). Individual moral codes are therefore able to have a significant impact on controlling the process of disinhibition as they can act as important regulators on behaviour.

Apart from individual moral codes, a feeling of empathy or compassion for the "object of hostility" has also been argued to control disinhibitory processes (Beck,

1999, p.19). According to Beck (1999), empathy is “often sufficient to inhibit the aggressor from inflicting an injury in the first place” (p.19). Humanizing a person or feeling empathy for them or their situation has been shown in numerous studies to be a self-deterrent to aggressive behaviour (Bandura, 1990, p.182). According to Bandura, Underwood and Fromson (1975), the power of humanizing potential victims is such that it becomes very difficult to harm others if the potential perpetrator sees them as similar to him or herself (p.267). Indeed, the results of Bandura, Underwood and Fromson’s (1975) experiments affirm that humanization, as well as personalization, “can serve as an effective corrective against aggression” (p.267). Furthermore, in a review of previous research and experiments on empathy and aggression, Miller and Eisenberg (1988) hypothesized that “aggressive behaviour, including physical and verbal aggression, as well as abusive behaviour, should be negatively related to empathy”. After both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the authors found “modest but not entirely consistent support for the notion that empathic responsiveness may be an inhibitor of aggression” (Miller and Eisenberg, 1988). However, Miller and Eisenberg point out that research on empathy and aggression had thus far been limited in that it needed to have been “conceptually clearer” and with more consistent models from which to analyse the phenomenon, and they note that the relation between empathy and aggression would have been stronger if this had been the case.

In a more recent experiment on empathy and attitudinal change, conclusions also seemed to point toward a relationship between empathy and aggression (Batson et al., 1997a). In this study, Batson et al. set up experiments to find out the effect feelings of empathy had on changing people’s attitudes toward “stigmatised” groups of people. They found that “inducing empathy for a member of a stigmatised group could improve attitudes” toward the person, and, interestingly, “improve attitudes toward the group as a whole” (p.113). From the above experiments, it is clear that empathy and humanization have a significant effect on inhibiting aggressive behaviour. As Waller (2002) notes, “humanizing, decategorizing, or personalizing others all create a powerful self-restraining effect. It is difficult to mistreat a person who has an actual identity, with flesh and blood and family” (p.274).

Besides an individual's moral code and the effect empathy and humanization have on aggressive behaviour, having a fear of the consequences or being threatened with punishment may also inhibit a person from undertaking violent acts. Berkowitz (1993) argues that "the threat of punishment does appear to reduce the rate of violent offenses to some degree, at least under some circumstances" (p.315); however, that it is "certainty of punishment that appears to be of greater importance" (p.319). Having a fear of the consequences of acting violently is able to inhibit aggressive behaviour as it brings about feelings of anxiety within a person – fearing the consequences could include fearing retaliation by the intended victim, for example, or the fear of being caught, and as mentioned above, the fear of being punished (Beck, 1999, p.20). Bandura (1973) posits that "negative consequences [of aggressive behaviour] may involve either withdrawal of rewards or administration of aversive effects" and that "punishment is rarely employed as the sole method of modifying aggressive behaviour. Rather, it is applied in conjunction with positive influences" so that inhibitions against aggression are strengthened (p.298). For example, a person may be inhibited from acting aggressively by both the threat of punishment and the withdrawal of rewards.

Feeling a sense of responsibility for one's actions is also an inhibitor of aggressive acts because a person will have an increased fear of the consequences if they feel solely responsible for undertaking violent or aggressive acts – "people are especially prone to minimize injurious effects when they act alone and thus cannot easily escape responsibility" (Bandura, 1990, p.177).

Apart from such fears as getting caught or punished, what is also able to serve as a "self-restraining" influence is being able to view or hear the consequences of their actions on their victims. It is "relatively easy to hurt others when their suffering is not visible and when causal actions are physically and temporally remote from their effects"; however, seeing others suffer is able to inhibit aggression because of the effect that viewing human suffering can have (Bandura, 1990, p.177). An example of this can be found in Milgrim's obedience experiments, where Milgrim "obtained diminishing obedience as the victim's pain became more evident" (Bandura, 1990, p.177).

Inhibitors to aggressive behaviour, such as the ones examined above, are able to exert a significant amount of control over our actions. Unfortunately, and as Bandura et al. (1996) note, “self-reactive influences do not operate unless they are activated, and there are many psychosocial processes by which self-sanctions can be disengaged from inhumane conduct. Selective activation and disengagement of internal control permits different types of conduct with the same moral standards”. Many scholars note the ease with which seemingly “normal” people are able to commit such horrifying actions as mass murder, genocide, or terrorism (Zimbardo, 1999; Waller, 2002), and the next four chapters of this thesis are devoted to understanding and analysing what psychological mechanisms and situations are potentially able to overcome any inhibitions a person has against violent or aggressive behaviour.

## **Conclusion:**

Disinhibition has been shown throughout this chapter to have a significant effect on contributing to aggressive and violent behaviour, including terrorism. The literature review that was provided demonstrated the importance of the release of inhibitions to understanding terrorism, and especially highlighted the significance of dehumanization, culture, religion and group dynamics. Bandura’s (1990; 2004) model also draws attention to this fact, showing concisely how self-regulating functions are able to be overcome in the case of terrorism. While it is important to examine how inhibitions against killing or harming other people are released or at least lowered, the way in which inhibitions are kept in place should also be discussed, which is why a section of this chapter concentrated on understanding what can inhibit people from acting violently. In this section, crucial inhibitors such as empathy, being able to see or hear the painful consequences of violent actions upon victims, as well as the threat of punishment were put forth as significant inhibitors to violence. However, as noted, the rest of this thesis details the ways in which these inhibitors can often be overcome, starting with an examination of empathy and dehumanization, and shows that they can indeed be surpassed to an alarming degree in many situations and by many different people, regardless of culture and religion.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

# **EMPATHY, THE CREATION OF HATE, AND DEHUMANIZATION**

While the previous chapter provided an analysis of disinhibition literature and its relation to terrorism, this chapter examines in greater depth the concepts of empathy, dehumanization, and the creation of hate in order to gain a greater understanding of how inhibitions to kill are overcome. Building on material from the literature review, this chapter therefore supplies a discussion and analysis of such processes as ‘us versus them’ thinking, how feelings of empathy are overcome, the power of dehumanizing the enemy, and the significance of such justifications as blaming the victim for terrorist actions. A comprehensive examination of the above concepts is essential in working toward a thorough understanding of how terrorists are psychologically able to harm or kill others because of the way in which those concepts are able to produce sufficient psychological distance for the perpetrator from their victim or victims, as well as provide the foundation to create a negative construct of the ‘enemy’. Through the illustrations of the Irish Republican Army and Palestinian suicide bombers, this chapter shows that the concepts of empathy, dehumanization, and the creation of hate are integral in creating many of the conditions that help in releasing inhibitions to kill.



## **Empathy and Compassion:**

As examined in the previous chapter, empathy and compassion are important inhibitors of violent behaviour. Not only can empathy inhibit aggressive behaviour before it begins, it is also important in that it can help to stop people from aggressing in the future (Miller and Eisenberg, 1987). While it was shown in the preceding chapter that emotions such as empathy are significant in inhibiting violent behaviour, this section of the chapter looks at the ways in which feelings of empathy and compassion are overcome or avoided so that disinhibited behaviour can occur.

Empathy has been described as “an other-oriented emotional response congruent with another’s perceived welfare” (Batson et al., 1997a, p.105). As such, an empathic response may include a feeling of sympathy or compassion (ibid, p.105). Empathy is developed over the course of a person’s childhood and youth, and as a consequence there are vast discrepancies in the amounts that different people come to possess (Baumeister, 1999). In other words, some people may develop a large capacity for empathy, while some may only develop a small capacity for it. To explain this variation, Baumeister (1999) contends that empathy is developed through a combination of “cognitive development and the influence of teaching and socialization” (p.223). It can, therefore, be argued that the amount of empathy a person develops depends to a great extent on what, and how, a person learns while growing up and into adulthood.

Although empathy is usually examined in terms of its ability to encourage positive behaviour toward others, there are some important ways in which feelings of empathy can be surpassed or quashed. The main way in which empathic responses towards others can be reasonably easily overcome is if a person views their potential victim as different, dissimilar to themselves, or simply “not like us” (Baumeister, 1999, p.315), so that an ‘us versus them’ mindset comes into play. Indeed, as Robins and Post (1997) argue, “to maintain the sense of group – and self – cohesion we must differentiate ourselves from strangers. Strangers, then, are necessary for our process of self-definition” (p.91). Just belonging to a certain group may therefore help

towards viewing others as different and thus less deserving of empathy, because the group to which they belong helps define who should and should not be empathized with.

The argument that feelings of empathy can be avoided or overcome if a person holds the view that their potential victim or victims are dissimilar to him or her self can be put forth for other possible reasons. For example, there is an evolutionary argument which holds that the “mechanism of kin selection” favours the existence of an altruistic mechanism that serves to “protect the interests of those that share our genes” (Pizarro, 2000, p.363). Because we naturally feel a connection to those we share our genes with, this serves as an explanation as to why those who appear to have different characteristics to ours are less likely to elicit empathic responses from us (ibid, p.363).

Alternatively, there is also a social psychological argument that can help to explain the existence or non-existence of empathy. This argument states that feelings of empathy originate and develop in “early infancy when the boundaries of self and other are diffuse”, and that an empathic response toward others is more likely to occur as an adult if potential victims are seen as similar because of the mechanism of ‘self-other merging’ (Pizarro, 2000, p.363). The social psychological concept of self-other merging posits that empathy brings about a perspective in which the distinction between oneself and others is decreased (Batson et al., 1997b). Pizarro argues that the distinction between the self and the other is heightened when a person comes across someone they perceive as different, and argues that “it is probably easier to lose sight of self-other boundaries with others that are more like the self than with others that are not at all like the self” (2000, p.363). Taken to the extreme, having a lack of empathy through regarding others as different can lead to dehumanization, a topic that is covered in greater depth in a later section of this chapter.

Apart from viewing others as dissimilar to oneself, one other main way that feelings of empathy and compassion can be avoided or overcome is by attributing to the potential victim blame for his or her own situation. Put quite simply, “individuals are less likely to feel empathy for targets to which they have attributed blame for their predicament” (Pizarro, 2000, p.363). Attributing blame to one’s intended victims not

only serves as a mechanism for avoiding feelings of empathy, but also acts as an important justification for violence against other people. This argument is echoed by Bandura (1990), who maintains that perpetrators of terrorism bypass feelings of compassion for their intended victims by framing their violent actions as not of their own making and attribute blame elsewhere, which therefore not only excuses their own behaviour, but also lets them “feel self-righteous in the process” (p.185). For example, Milgrim’s obedience experiments show how attributing blame to the victim for their predicament let the subject of the experiment feel justified in shocking him or her and justified also in heightening the maltreatment, as many subjects expressed such rationalizations as “he was so stupid he deserved to get shocked” (Waller, 2002, p.251). Indeed, one consequence of avoiding empathy by blaming the intended victim for any actions taken against them is that it becomes easier – and, in a perpetrator’s mind, more justifiable – to continue violence against them, as putting the blame on some other actor also allows the real perpetrators to further derogate their enemy (Bandura, 1990, p.185). Often in cases of terrorism, perpetrators attribute responsibility for their violence to the governments of the people they have attacked, however they do not often differentiate between a government and its citizens when deciding on targets because they view them as one in the same.

One other important way in which empathy can be overcome is if a considerable amount of anger exists toward a particular person, or more generally toward a group of people. This anger usually comes from what people perceive as a genuine and valid grievance about something (Beck, 2002). In the case of terrorism, anger often derives from a perceived political grievance. This grievance may be due to an economic, social or political situation, and may have been in existence for a significant amount of time (Moghadam, 2003). In any case, anger is able to surpass feelings of empathy towards other people because it allows people to believe they have been wronged and therefore have a legitimate grievance against others that can be used to justify violence against them (Beck, 2002).

In addition to the above arguments, one problem that arises in relation to empathy is that much of the research on the subject finds that empathy is usually “felt for individuals as individuals, not for groups or abstract classes of people” (Batson et al., 1997a). That is, even if a person feels a degree of empathy toward a potential victim,

they may still feel no empathy towards the group to which the individual belongs; in which case any empathy afforded to the individual will be of little value because the empathy is not generalised to their group as a whole. In this situation, it may well be that the victim is perceived by the terrorist not as an individual person but merely as an outgroup member, which is what often results from an ‘us versus them’ way of thinking. As highlighted throughout this thesis, this kind of thinking is pervasive in terrorist organizations.

So, to reiterate, overcoming or avoiding empathy is often achieved through perceiving another person or group as people as different from oneself, or alternatively, seeing them as deserving of any violent actions taken against them. Possessing a lack of empathy may also be derived from the biological argument noted above, which claims that we naturally maintain a lack of empathy toward those we are not physically similar to, or the social psychological argument, which posits that we learn who is similar to us and who is not from a very young age, and tend to be more empathetic towards those that are more like ‘us’. Aside from these, anger too also often holds an important place in being able to surpass feelings of empathy towards others.

### *The IRA and Palestinian Suicide Bombers*

Turning to the cases mentioned earlier, one of the most noticeable ways in which inhibitions to kill are surpassed by IRA members is that they regularly attribute blame for their terror away from themselves. Following the Enniskillen bombing, in which eleven civilians were killed while attending a war remembrance service, the IRA firstly tried to claim that the bombing and resulting deaths were not their fault but that of the British, and argued that the British Army’s radio signals had set off the bomb, explaining that it was actually meant to go off at another time of the day (Sharrock and Devenport, 1997, p.256). Sean MacStiofain, a high-ranking official in the IRA for some time, rationalized the ‘Bloody Friday’ bombs of 1979 (which killed eleven people) as a direct result of British officials – he claimed that “the blame was [on] the people who [had] deliberately not given the warnings to the public” (‘The IRA and Sinn Fein’, [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)).

Cases of IRA terrorism where only one person has been the target have also seen the IRA blame their victim. For example, a man deliberately shot and killed by a group of IRA gunmen was targeted because he was seen as helping the 'enemy' due to his job as a supplier of fruit and vegetables to the British security forces, alluding to the fact that he may still have been alive had he not been employed in such a job (McGartland, 1997, p.254). Indeed, as the IRA's 'Green Book' comments about who is classed as part of the 'establishment' they are fighting and thus who is an 'enemy', "the establishment is all those who have a vested interest in maintaining the present status quo... politicians, media, judiciary, [and] certain business elements" (Coogan, 1993). Hence, any empathy for such victims is deemed unnecessary because they have brought their predicament upon themselves.

Another example of the IRA blaming the victims of their terrorism is the reasons they give for attacking British officials. One IRA member has remarked on this matter that "we'll always select individual members of the British establishment for assassination because they make themselves part of this war. They advocate shooting and hanging our people. That makes them legitimate targets" (Dillon, 1994, p.222). This kind of belief can be illustrated by the IRA's bombing of the British Conservative Party's conference in Brighton in 1984, which killed and injured a number of civilians, when Gerry Adams announced after the bombing that the attack was an "inevitable result of the British occupation of the six counties" (*Irish News*, 1984; cited in Wright, 1990, p.31).

Like the IRA, Palestinian suicide bombers also appear to hold an obvious lack of empathy towards those they target. As one would-be suicide bomber (whose explosives malfunctioned at the last minute) answered when asked if he was upset that he failed in his mission to kill Israelis, "naturally one feels sad because the operation [did] not come off and Jews were not killed" (Simon, 2003). Nasra Hassan, who interviewed members of Palestinian terror groups, has also noted the significant lack of empathy that is evident in suicide bombers' attitudes to those they target: "they all talked matter-of-factly about the bombings, showing an unshakable conviction in the rightness of their cause and their methods. When I asked them if they had any qualms about killing innocent civilians, they would immediately respond, 'the Israelis kill our children and women. This is war, and innocent people

get hurt’” (Hassan, 2001). This shows that there exists a distinct lack of empathy towards perpetrator’s victims because of the way in which they do not seem to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate targets – if innocent civilians happen to get hurt, this can be justified in their eyes by the claim that there is a war on and, therefore, these kind of things are inevitable and should not be entirely blamed on the terrorist group.

Closely tied to this lack of empathy amongst Palestinian terrorists is the fact that Israel and Israeli authorities are overwhelmingly blamed for suicide attacks. Indeed, Israeli civilians are often blamed for the terrorism perpetrated against them because they elected particular Israeli governments into office. An official from Fatah epitomized this attitude of deflecting blame away from the terror organizations for violence when he argued in an interview that “Prime Minister Sharon’s terror policy... is responsible for the victims on both sides. The Israeli victims are victims from his policy as well as the Palestinian victims” (Davis, 2003, p.103). Indeed, the father of a suicide bomber echoes this sentiment by arguing that Sharon was to blame for suicide bombings: “he is continuing the policy of killing our people, and my son succeeded in carrying out a suitable response” (Davis, 2003, p.131).

Similarly, an Islamist military official stated that “if our wives and children are not safe from Israeli tanks and rockets, theirs will not be safe from our human bombs”. An imprisoned Palestinian terrorist also comments along the same lines, arguing that it was “kind of conduct” Israelis used against Palestinians that left “no choice but to strike at you [Israelis] without mercy in every possible way” (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.178). Spokesmen from Palestine Islamic Jihad argue closely to this, stating that “we believe that Israel actually forces us to have the kind of strategies we have. We’re not going to sit and be spectators to what Sharon and his government are doing here and not answer them in their own language” (Davis, 2003, p.140).

## **The Creation of Hate:**

Linked to empathy and compassion, the creation of hate is also central in helping to remove inhibitions to kill (Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975). Essentially, hate can be defined as an “extreme dislike” of a person or group of people, and is often coupled with “aggressive impulses” against those toward which the emotion is directed (Sternberg, 2003). There are numerous ways in which this hate can be cultivated, and it is an issue that has received much attention in the literature on human violence (see, for example, Sternberg, 2003; Sanford and Comstock, 1971). One way that hate may be created is by frustrating certain human needs. According to Staub (1999), such human needs are psychological in nature, and consist of such needs as self-efficacy, the need to connect to the world around us, and the need to feel a sense of security in everyday life (p.181). If people are not able to have these needs fulfilled, they will employ particularly “destructive psychological processes and actions” to fulfil them (Staub, 1999, p.181). These destructive processes often include the devaluing and dehumanizing of others, which demonstrates the relation between the creation of hate and the dehumanization of the enemy, an important disinhibitor of violence.

### *A Model for the Development of Hatred*

Sternberg’s (2003) model on the development of hatred toward others is particularly relevant to this thesis, as it highlights the relation between hatred and the psychological origins of terrorism. The model argues that there are three components which make up hate, and that these components can appear in “different ways on different occasions”. The first component is negation of intimacy. It is argued here that if a person feels such emotions as repulsion or disgust toward a person or people, they will tend to psychologically distance themselves from them. Although this process is reasonably slow to develop, it is also reasonably slow to disappear – the main effect of this process of distancing being cementing feelings of hatred. Distancing is usually achieved through depicting the enemy in dehumanized terms, as

either a subhuman or nonhuman creature. As demonstrated in an upcoming section of this chapter, dehumanization and its effects are substantial disinhibitors for terrorism.

The second component of hate is passion. This component “expresses itself as intense anger or fear in response to a threat”, however while it arises quickly it fades just as fast. It helps to make feelings of hate more concrete within a person because it encourages the ‘us versus them’ mentality, and it can be created by perceiving or viewing these ‘enemies’ as people to be feared. This fear may spring from any number of reasons, for example because of a person or group’s real or imagined danger to ‘us’ or because they are simply inherently evil and are thus to be feared if for no other reason (Sternberg, 2003). In this way, often if hatred is combined with anger a lack of empathy will exist toward those the hate is directed at, which in turn helps release inhibitions to kill.

The last component of the model is what Sternberg terms “decision-commitment in hate”. This component works in the way that it changes the “thought processes of the preferred population so that its members will conceive of the targeted group(s) in a devalued way” (Sternberg, 2003). In line with the first component, this may be achieved by presenting the targeted group of people in dehumanized terms, and is often extremely successful in encouraging and reinforcing hate because it allows people to think in a certain way that perpetuates a person’s already existing feelings of hatred or hostility. Sternberg also asserts that there are a number of factors that help produce this decision-commitment in hate, two of which seem pertinent when discussing terrorism. The first factor is simply to view one’s own group as more favourable than the targeted other. The second factor builds on the first, and requires viewing members of the targeted group as “largely homogenous” rather than composed of differing and unique individuals (Sternberg, 2003). While these two factors may seem obvious, they are nonetheless important to note because they result from the ‘us versus them’ thinking that was previously mentioned to be evident in terrorism. Finally, the model argues that the three components previously described – negation of intimacy, passion, and decision-commitment in hate – work best as a triangle, where the most effective method of fomenting and reinforcing hatred is to employ all three (Sternberg, 2003).



### *The Myth of Pure Evil*

In addition to the above model, capitalizing upon such beliefs as the ‘myth of pure evil’ can also stir up feelings of hate. The myth of pure evil is a particular myth that people tend to believe about other groups of people whom they already treat with some level of suspicion or hostility, and it essentially allows people to believe that those they are fighting or aggressing on some level against are purely evil (Baumeister, 1999). Beliefs such as this one are particularly important as they can act as both an introducer and reinforcer of hate. Although people tend to automatically perceive the group to which they belong as ‘good’ while another is ‘bad’, the stronger the tendency is to see themselves as good, the more chance this will inevitably result in viewing the other as evil, largely because the opposite of good can be nothing other than this (ibid, 1999, p.67-68). Indeed, as Keen (1986) points out, feelings of hostility and hatred are developed more fully once stereotypes are set in place. Hate is therefore concretized the more a group believes they hold “positive, inclusive, and desirable” values while the other group does not (Baumeister, 1999, p.182). Inevitably following from this, it may then become almost an obligation to hate those who seem to conflict with these values (ibid, p.182). Viewing people in this one-dimensional manner (simply as evil and nothing else) also serves as a method for dehumanization as it lets people believe they are dealing with people who do not think or feel like other, good human beings.

Hatred clearly plays a large part in disinhibiting terrorists to act violently because, as noted previously, much of the time this hatred comes from feelings of anger, which helps people to surpass feelings of empathy. As Sternberg’s model demonstrates, feelings of hatred can help enormously in breaking down inhibitions against violence, especially in terms of ‘us versus them’ thinking and dehumanization. Indeed, Dillon (1994) notes that while “it would be incorrect to claim that all members of the Provisional IRA share a hatred of the English” it can still be stated that “such an element does exist within the IRA psyche” (Dillon, 1994, p.210). For example, as one IRA member explains, “we fought the English to liberate part of this country, yet they... allow their underlings... to treat the Catholic population like shit... The English people have their army on our soil killing our people... Ask people who were

colonized what they think of the English and they will be the same as me. Ask the English and the hatred is mutual” (ibid, p.210). Martin McGartland, an ex-IRA member, illustrates the existence of such hate, noting that even as a young person when he and his friends would attempt to attack British Army vehicles and succeed in stopping them they would cheer and feel “exhilarated” at what was seen by them as a triumph over the “hated enemy” (1997, p.23). Anger throughout the Catholic Irish community was also especially noticeable whenever they believed they were being treated unfairly or perceived they had been attacked by their ‘enemy’. For example, after the death of Bobby Sands, an imprisoned IRA member who succeeded in deliberately starving himself to death while in prison, it was observed that “the anger throughout the community was almost tangible” and many people had become “so passionate and bitter” about the issue (McGartland, 1997). On this issue, much of the anger and hatred was centred on the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and following the hunger strike situation, one member of the republican movement commented that he was “heartbroken when Thatcher wasn’t killed in the Brighton bomb”, explaining that her policy toward the hunger strikers had caused him feel this way (Toolis, 1995, p.349).

Hatred is also very much present in Palestinian suicide bombers’ justifications for terrorism against Israelis. One convicted Palestinian terrorist argued that his hate toward Israelis was in reaction to the way Palestinians perceive they have been treated: “You Israelis... adopted methods of collective punishment, you uprooted people from their homeland and from their homes and chased them into exile. You fired live ammunition at women and children. You smashed the skulls of defenceless civilians” (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.178). Indeed, the interviewers of the imprisoned terrorists noted that the feeling of hate toward Israelis throughout the interviewing process was “remarkable” (ibid). Others argue in a similar line of reasoning. For example, Eyad El Sarraj, a Palestinian psychiatrist working in Gaza, notes that “anybody who is living in this area... would have seen the rise of temperature, the rise of hatred, the rise of anger every year after year” of both militant and non-militant Palestinians (Simon, 2003), especially since the beginning of the uprising in 2000. Often this intense anger and hatred is in response to the killing of a friend or family member, as in the case of Hanadi Garidat, who went on to blow herself up in an Israeli restaurant. Both Garidat’s brother and cousin had recently

been killed by Israeli forces, and she was known to have remarked shortly after their deaths that “the killer will pay the price... If our people cannot live in freedom and dignity, then let all the world be destroyed” (Kimhi and Even, 2004, p.18).

The first two sections of this chapter have sought to show how a lack of empathy and harbouring hate towards a person or group of people are able to create the conditions for the process of disinhibition in relation to killing to occur. The remainder of this chapter looks at the concept of dehumanization, its importance to understanding disinhibition in terrorism, and its relation to the other concepts that have been examined in this chapter.

### **Dehumanization:**

Dehumanization, as characterized in previous chapters, is a process whereby a person comes to view others as either subhuman or inhuman. This can mean regarding another person (or more generally a group of people) as, for example, a “crazed killer, sadistic torturer, rapist, barbarian, gorilla, saber-toothed monster, reptile, rat or devil” (Beck, 1999, p.204). Bandura (1990) states that “the strength of self-censuring reactions to injurious conduct depends partly on how the perpetrator views the people toward whom the harmful behaviour is directed... it is difficult to mistreat humanized persons without risking self-condemnation” (p.180).

One of the main reasons dehumanization is able to accelerate disinhibited aggressive behaviour is because it alleviates the necessity to feel guilt about violence against others (Baumeister, 1999). In other words, there is far less of a chance that a person will feel guilty about harming something non-human than they will human because any “human connection” between the terrorist and their victims will have been severed (ibid). As Bernard, Ottenberg and Redl state about the dehumanization process and viewing others in dehumanized terms, “if they are [seen as] subhumans they have not yet reached full human status on the evolutionary ladder and, therefore, do not merit being treated as human” (1971, p.105). Indeed, even if a person appears

to have a sense of morality, they may not feel any guilt over harming dehumanized others because “regarding others outside our universe of moral obligation, and, therefore, not deserving of compassionate treatment removes normal moral constraints against aggression” (Waller, 2002, p.245). Feelings of guilt are thus overridden because the perpetrator sees their victim as distinctly dissimilar to themselves and other people generally (Baumeister, 1999).

The lack of a human connection between perpetrator and victim, as alluded to earlier, is also important to the disinhibiting process for terrorists, because there is a high degree of emotional detachment from the situation. This is because once a person begins to view others in dehumanized terms, their relationship to them becomes “stereotyped, rigid, and... unexpressive of mutuality” (Bernard, Ottenberg and Redl, 1971, p.112). Thus, dehumanization is able to produce a state of “psychic numbing” because a person’s capacity to make human connections to those they target is from then on severely reduced (Kelman, 1973, p.52). This state of psychic numbing lets a person lose their ability to “act as a moral being”, and can occur due to what was mentioned near the beginning of this chapter about what may happen if there exists an advanced lack of empathy toward another person or group. Kelman (1973) argues that dehumanization arises and is heightened by the degree to which a person does not perceive others as being “independent and distinguishable” from other people as well as denying that they are part of an “interconnected network of individuals” (p.48-49). These two aspects are thus able to further disinhibited behaviour because the injury or death of someone else is seen as unimportant, due to the fact that, in Kelman’s words, “their death does not move us in a personal way” (1973, p.49).

One important study that has shown the capacity that dehumanization has to disinhibit aggressive behaviour is that of Bandura, Underwood and Fromson (1975). Their study, as mentioned in chapter two, examined two variables – diffusion of responsibility and dehumanization of victims – in terms of their ability to affect disinhibited aggressive behaviour. The experiments in the study consisted of subjects that were presented with other participants who had been portrayed to the subjects in humanized, dehumanized and neutral terms by the experimenters. The subjects were informed that they had to shock the other participants as punishment when they did something that the subjects had been informed was a wrong response. Results clearly

showed that “dehumanized performers were treated more than twice as punitively” as the humanized participants, and noticeably more harshly than those not characterized as either (Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975, p.266). This study also highlighted the ability that viewing others in dehumanized terms has on escalating aggression, as the experimenters noted that “when punishment usually failed to eliminate errors, aggression was precipitously escalated to extreme levels with dehumanized performers; it increased gradually then levelled off at a moderate level with neutral performers; and, after an initial rise, it deescalated and fluctuated around a low level of punishment with humanized performers” (ibid, p.265). Interestingly, the study also noted that while dehumanization on its own is not able to fully disinhibit violent behaviour, when it was combined with other mechanisms, especially diffusion of responsibility, disinhibition as a process came about far more quickly and was able to yield harsher behaviour (Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975). In the case of terrorism, this experiment shows just how simple dehumanizing others can be, as well as demonstrating its link with continued and harsher violence against others.

#### *Dehumanization by IRA Members and Palestinian Suicide Bombers*

Within the IRA and amongst Palestinian suicide bombers, examples of dehumanization are not difficult to find. Indeed, republican ideology from its beginnings has continuously viewed the British in Ireland as “representatives of an occupying force” rather than as people (Drake, 1998). The IRA have also been known to view their enemies as ‘types’: for example, “‘corner boy’ ex-servicemen, ‘black’ Orangemen or freemasons, dirty tramps and ‘tinkers’” (Hart, 1999). Those who were seen as belonging to such categories would often be “denounced as ‘informers’, or ‘enemies of the republic’ and shot, burned out, or intimidated” (ibid, p.230). The comments of Maria McGuire, a former IRA member, also indicate the extent to which dehumanization was evident within the organization: “I admit that at the time I did not connect with the people who were killed in ... explosions. I always judged such deaths in terms of the effect they would have on our support” (McGuire, 1987, p.103).

An obvious example of the IRA's dehumanization of the enemy can be found in one particular propaganda poster distributed by members of the organization. This poster depicts the British as pigs with blood dripping from their exceptionally large fang-like teeth, with the words "British Pigs!" in capital letters below the dripping blood (Keen, 1986, p.113). Interestingly, one IRA gunman was also known to have described the shooting of his 'enemies' in Ireland as like "aiming at the moving ducks in a fairground shooting gallery" (McGuire, 1987, p.75). In addition to the above examples, in 1992 IRA gunmen set out to shoot and kill a part-time UDR man named Eric Glass while he was off-duty and at his day job. After this mission failed and one of the IRA men was killed instead, the dead IRA man's family argued that their son would have set out to kill Glass as an "enemy", and would not have been attacking him "as a person" because Glass would have been seen as a "representation of the British occupation" of Ireland and nothing more (Toolis, 1995, p.356-358).

Dehumanization of the enemy in the case of Palestinian suicide bombers also appears to be important for disinhibiting aggressive and violent behaviour. Militant Palestinian groups constantly refer to Israelis as the "Zionist enemy" (Karmon, 2003), the "Zionist Occupier" (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003), or similarly as the "Zionist foe" (Abu-Amr, 1994). The Hamas charter itself states that it is imperative for all young Palestinians to meticulously study "the enemy and its material and human potential; to detect its weak and strong spots" and also teaches about Israel and Israelis – characterizing the Israelis not as people but as a concept – that "the Zionist invasion is a vicious invasion. It does not refrain from resorting to all methods, using all evil and despicable and repulsive ways to achieve its desires" ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). This description of the 'enemy' clearly serves to depict them in such dehumanized terms as a merciless aggressor or simply as some kind of evil, monstrous, non-human entity.

One imprisoned Palestinian terrorist exemplifies how dehumanization is able to disinhibit violent behaviour as he views his victims not as people but instead as a faceless body count: "the main thing was the amount of blood. The aim was to cause as much carnage as possible" (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.183). A clear illustration of dehumanization of the enemy can be found in a chant that went up in a crowd shortly after the news of a suicide bombing perpetrated by Islamic Jihad,

where the casualties of the attack were referred to by those in the crowd as “the death of twenty monkeys, the injuries of sixty pigs!” (Robins and Post, 1997, p.146). Other clear examples of dehumanization of the enemy can be found in the suicide notes that bombers leave behind. For example, in the will of a Palestinian suicide bomber, who committed an attack in 1995, it was written that “I am going to take revenge upon the sons of monkeys and the pigs, the Zionist infidels and the enemies of humanity” (Brooks, 2002, p.19).

### *Euphemistic Language*

One of the most important avenues leading to and reinforcing dehumanization is euphemistic language. Euphemistic language is not only able to reinforce dehumanization but it is also central in creating the essential psychological distance for the perpetrator from their victim. In explaining the role that euphemisms play in disinhibition of aggression, Bandura (1990) writes that “activities can take on a very different appearance depending on what they are called. Euphemistic language thus provides a convenient device for masking reprehensible activities or even conferring a respectable status upon them” (p.170). Euphemistic language also allows perpetrators of violence to escape confronting the real meaning of the words they use, and is able to suppress any “moral revulsion” that using the normal words would provoke (Kelman, 1973, p.48). Although euphemistic language is referred to in upcoming chapters, it has special importance to this chapter because of its ability to use language to transform people into subhuman or inhuman objects.

An illustration of euphemistic language used in terrorism is when terrorists describe themselves as “freedom fighters” who fight in response to repressive forces, or when they refer to the deaths of those who were not their intended targets as, for example, “collateral damage” (Bandura, 1990, p.170). When using euphemisms to label other people or the violent acts themselves, there are usually two types of euphemisms that are most often employed to dehumanize victims (Baumeister, 1999). Firstly, there is the ‘extermination’ metaphor, where it is stated that “to say the enemy must be exterminated is to reduce the enemy to the status of subhuman vermin” (ibid, p.317). Once the subhumanity of the victim is established, killing them is much more easily justified as it is presented as the disposing of “worthless, troublesome pests” (ibid,

p.317). Secondly, there is also a 'medical' metaphor (Baumeister, 1999). The most common example of the use of this metaphor is the "analogy of amputation", where the victims of violence are presented as something along the lines of a diseased body part, which if cut off or removed will save what remains of the body (ibid, p.317). Interestingly, the usage of this medical metaphor to create euphemisms also encourages the perception that the victims are deserving of any violent actions taken against them. This is because they end up being depicted as "carriers of disease who pose the risk of infecting the rest of the societal body. They may look like ordinary human beings, but in fact they are dangerous" (Baumeister, 1999, p.317).

Within the IRA, euphemistic labelling plays a subtle yet evident role. Virtually all IRA members refer to their violence against those they target as, for example, an 'armed struggle', or a "military war of national liberation" (Coogan, 1993) and particular missions themselves as an 'operation', often shortened to just an 'op' (McGartland, 1997, p.176). As well as this, the killing of people is often referred to as 'stiffing'. For example, one IRA member commented that for one operation in particular it should be possible to "stiff at least a dozen" of their enemy (ibid, p.253). While not regarding themselves as terrorists, those belonging to the IRA prefer to label themselves in such terms as revolutionaries (MacStiofain, 1975) guerrillas (Dillon, 1994) or freedom fighters (McGuire, 1987).

Euphemisms are prevalent to a higher degree amongst Palestinian suicide bombers. A news item on the official Hamas website, for example, often refers to its suicide bombers as "martyrdom bombers" who succeed in carrying out "operations" within Israel against "Zionist" targets such as buses ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). Indeed, the clearest illustration of the use of euphemisms in the Palestinian terrorism context is that an act of suicide terrorism is always reworded into such terms as a "martyrdom operation", which obviously takes away from the fact that suicide bombings are designed not only to kill the bomber but to take away the lives of as many 'enemies' as possible. As well as this, senior Hamas military commanders claim that suicide attacks are so effective because they guarantee that a "large number of the enemy" will be "affected", rather than mentioning they would be killed or maimed (Hassan, 2001). In another example of euphemistic language, this time in accordance with the medical metaphor approach that was described earlier, one imprisoned Palestinian



terrorist recalls that “the sheik... used to explain to us the significance of the fact that there was an IDF military outpost in the heart of the [refugee] camp. He compared it to a cancer in the human body, which was threatening [the camp’s] very existence” (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.177).

## **Conclusion:**

Releasing any inhibitions a person has against violence toward other human beings has been shown to be reasonably easy to achieve if a person harbours a sense of hatred towards a particular person or group, has a distinct lack of empathy towards them, or views them in a dehumanized manner. While this may seem simplistic, the psychological processes behind hatred, empathy and dehumanization should not be underestimated. As this chapter demonstrated, a lack of empathy is related to attributing blame to others for one’s own violence, an important disinhibitory mechanism, as well as the perception of dissimilarity between people who really are not that different, and also has a close link to anger. The creation of hate toward others was also shown to have a relationship with anger, and just as importantly, to beliefs such as the myth of pure evil. Dehumanization, which often stems from a complete lack of empathy for particular people or groups of people, is perhaps one of the most important disinhibitors of violent behaviour when it comes to terrorism, as exemplified by the two illustrative cases. Dehumanization is such a significant disinhibitor for the reasons emphasized in this chapter; namely, its ability to absolve people of feelings of guilt for violence and its ability to provide a substantial amount of psychological distance between a perpetrator and their victim(s). Dehumanization is also often reinforced through the use of euphemistic language, as shown clearly through the examples of the IRA and Palestinian suicide terrorism. The following chapter, while focussing on cultural belief systems and the processes associated with them, also highlights many of the points emphasized in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **CULTURE AND BELIEF SYSTEM**

Belonging to a culture provides for its members a history, a sense of values and morality, and above all, a sense of identity. This chapter seeks to understand how a culture and its belief system are able to act as agents of disinhibition in relation to terrorism. As such, it analyses socialization, education, and cultural myths and ideologies. It discusses what socialization is, why it is important, and looks at what the 'agents' of socialization are, for example, parents and family members. Although education is a form of socialization, it will be looked at as a separate section because of its importance on its own in being able to affect people's thoughts and actions. This section looks at such influences as school and government teachings as well as the role of the media in shaping attitudes and beliefs. The importance of cultural myths and ideologies should not be underestimated, which is why this chapter devotes a section to it as well as the above concepts. This later part of the chapter thus looks at the prevalence, importance, and effects that historical cultural myths and cultural ideologies have on those living within a culture. Like the previous chapter, examples of the concepts and ideas discussed will be taken from the IRA and Palestinian suicide bombers in order to provide a fuller picture of the importance that cultural processes and cultural sanctioning of particular beliefs and behaviours play in disinhibiting aggressive and violent behaviour.

## **Socialization: The Family and Social Group:**

It is through a process of socialization that an individual comes to learn cultural norms and appropriate rules of behaviour. Essentially, socialization can be defined as “the process by which the infant learns the ways of a given social group and is molded into an effective participant” (Dager, 1971, p. ix-x). It is a process that passes on “the lessons of the past to the current generation” and it also provides a model of what the culture says is the correct way to act in order to become a good citizen and person (Zimbardo, 1999). One main reason it is such an important process for releasing inhibitions for participating in terrorism is because it is able to affect thoughts and behaviour gradually, often perhaps unnoticeably. To illustrate this point, Bandura (1990) argues that terrorist behaviour develops through an “extensive” socialization process, instead of “emerging full-blown”. As such, “the path to terrorism can be shaped by... the conjoint influence of personal predilections and social inducements. Development of the capability to kill usually evolves through a process in which recruits may not fully recognize the transformation they are undergoing” (ibid, p.185-6). While a significant amount of terrorist groups appear to observers to be out of line with that particular culture’s values, it seems pertinent to note that in cultures where conflict against some other ethnic group is the norm, cultural sanctioning of terrorist actions, whether implicit or explicit, can help to lower people’s inhibitions against participating in violent activities, as the illustrative cases demonstrate further on in this chapter.

Social learning theory (see Windmiller, Lambert and Turiel, 1980) puts forth the argument that “human nature is characterized as a vast potentiality that can be fashioned by social influences into a variety of forms” (Bandura, 1973, p.113). Because of this, socialization is theorized to exert a very powerful influence on an individual. Indeed, according to social learning theory, psychologically every human being is a “clean slate on which society writes the experience for the individual. The family, the social class, the institutions, and the culture into which one is born determine to a great extent the life of the individual” (Windmiller, 1980, p.4).

Parents and other family members have an especially influential role in socializing the culture's norms and values to their children. Indeed, social learning theory assumes that values and morals are primarily attained from the influences of parents through such practices as modeling and imitation, which are "then gradually internalized in early childhood... Reinforcement, whether positive or negative, and punishment help determine which of the learned moral behaviours will be internalized" (Windmiller, 1980, p.22). In social learning theory, then, the parental role is a crucial one in "directly inculcating" the principles and morals of the culture (ibid).

Even outside of social learning theory, it is also argued that family members (especially parents) are one of the main ways in which a person learns the appropriate social behaviour of a given culture. In this way, it is noted that the prospects for people, and especially children, to "learn from and imitate other family members" are vast, and that "even when there are strong negative overtones, their influence cannot be denied" (Barner Barry and Rosenwein, 1985, p.93-94). The immediate social and peer group to which one belongs is also a significant agent of socialization and is closely related to the effect that family members have on socializing beliefs. It is theorized that once children become adolescent or even pre-adolescent, there is a propensity to look out for and identify with role models – Barner-Barry and Rosenwein argue that within peer groups "there is a definite tendency toward contagion" in relation to certain behaviours, and note that the power of peer groups is such that their influence does not stop when a child becomes an adult (1985, p.97). Indeed, while children grow and learn with their friends, adults have their "friendship groups... professional groups, and work groups, as well as religious, fraternal, sports, and civic organizations", which also serve as socializing influences for a culture's norms and values (ibid, p.97).

Part of the IRA's tradition of violence can be attributed to the influence of family members and the wider social group. For instance, even in the mid-1990s, in smaller rural communities in Ireland at least, "it is still true that a certain amount of emotional satisfaction is derived from having a known IRA man living in the neighbourhood; and people will do good turns for him even though they publicly disown his methods" (Moxon-Browne, 1993, p.151-152). From this example, it can be seen that IRA

members do indeed hold some sort of revered place in certain communities and social groups. This kind of cultural sanctioning helps give legitimation to the IRA as an organization, as it permeates through the community the message that supporting and participating in the organization is to some extent morally justified, or at the very least morally permissible.

An example of the influence of social and peer groups on attitudes and behaviours can be found in certain games and activities many young Irish children participated in while growing up. As former IRA man Martin McGartland writes, “stopping the Saracens [British Army vehicles] became one of our favourite sports. The stronger boys would steal aluminium beer kegs from the pub ... When the Saracens were a few yards away, they would all hurl the kegs at the same time. The kegs would usually bounce off harmlessly but sometimes the Saracens would be brought to a halt... Stopping the Saracens.... would be the talk of the school playground for days” (1993, p.23). From these kinds of games, children were able to learn about who their ‘enemy’ was as well as learning that what they were doing brought them not punishment but a higher social status amongst people of their own age. This may in turn have also helped to lower others’ inhibitions to joining in with such activities.

Additionally, there are some communities in particular throughout both the North and South of Ireland which help to fuel support for and legitimate IRA violence. Within these communities, the entire population contributes toward ‘the struggle’ in some way, often either assisting the IRA in a financial sense or by becoming an active member (Apter, 1990). Growing up and living in such an atmosphere can clearly affect attitudes toward violence and the ‘rightness’ of the IRAs cause, and may also therefore lower inhibitions to joining the group and taking part in its activities, as such behaviour is seen as culturally sanctioned. Indeed, in some towns and communities there are even “murals on outside walls [which] juxtapose Che Guevara, IRA Provisionals and the guns and berets of the Black Panthers”, while in others “everyone has scrapbooks, objects, letters and poems involving prison and the struggle” (Apter, 1990). In these kinds of cases, socialization is able to culturally sanction and legitimate the IRA and its activities, which therefore also helps to lower inhibitions to taking part in the organization’s terrorist activities, as it becomes socially acceptable and even praiseworthy to do so.

It is also pertinent to note that, particularly early on in the twentieth century, those joining the IRA did so more often than not with friends or relatives, and that it was “these relationships that determined who became members and activists” (Hart, 1999, p.228). In Cork, during the same period, almost half of the areas’ IRA members were either next-door neighbours or members of the same family (ibid, p.228). Joe McManus, an IRA man shot dead while on an Army ‘operation’, was clearly influenced by family members and their attitude toward the IRA. Explained his father in a press statement shortly after Joe’s death, “we respect his decision to join Oglagh na hEireann [the IRA]... Joseph believed as we do, that our country will never have peace until Britain leaves Ireland and its people are free to decide their own future. We are deeply proud of him” (Toolis, 1995, p.361-362). Interestingly, a number of Irish families (though of course not all) seem to have held similar views about their own children or family members joining the organization.

In Palestinian areas, it appears that suicide bombing is culturally sanctioned to such a high degree that there exists a “cult of the suicide bomber”, to the extent that it is believed “there is no higher calling” than becoming a suicide bomber for Palestine (Simon, 2003). Such an environment clearly paves the way for surpassing inhibitions against terrorism, as suicide bombing is not only culturally sanctioned; it has been revered by a large majority of society. The influence of particularly parents and siblings is especially important in the case of Palestinian suicide bombing, as family is vitally important in Palestinian culture as a whole (Shinar, 1987, p85). For example, one captured would-be suicide bomber remarked that if his mother had learnt of his death as a ‘martyr’, she would have “burst with joy” (Simon, 2003). Munir al Makdah, a trainer of Palestinian terrorists, has even remarked that Palestinian youths come to him from their parent’s homes “already imbued with a certain sense of wanting to fight” (Davis, 2003, p.154). Other families promote cultural symbols of suicide bombing throughout their homes, such as displaying posters of green birds flying through a purple sky (Hassan, 2001). A Palestinian woman, with two young sons, argued that it was the “duty of every Palestinian mother to encourage her sons and daughters to become martyrs” (Victor, 2003, p.102).

Perhaps nowhere else is this sentiment more acute than in the example of Um Nidal, the mother of a male suicide bomber who she encouraged throughout his life to become a martyr for the Palestinian cause. When he and her other children were young, Nidal harboured a Hamas commander for well over a year in her home, in which time her son was able to learn about Hamas and essentially became his “pupil” (Victor, 2003, p.166). Years later, after Nidal’s son would go out with a gun at different times in order to shoot Israelis but come back without success, his mother would calm her son and tell him that “an opportunity would happen and to be patient, plan well” in readiness for his impending martyrdom (Victor, 2003, p.167). After her son had finally succeeded in a suicide attack, the entire family boasted of their son and brother’s attack, his mother proudly justifying it by saying “jihad is a commandment imposed on all of us” (ibid, p.166). While this may seem a somewhat extreme example, the views of Nidal and the values her family hold can be seen in many Palestinian families (Davis, 2003).

Aside from family, one significant influence for young Palestinians to participate in terrorist activities is their friends and wider social group – as one imprisoned Palestinian terrorist explained at the time he joined a terrorist group, “everyone was joining”, and, during that time at least, it was often friends who recruited each other (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003). When someone joined a group, they were then “treated with great respect” by those in their community and received “better treatment than unaffiliated kids” by their social group (ibid, p.178). On top of this, it was remarked that anyone who did not join during the most recent intifada was “ostracized” by the rest of their friends and social group as a whole. In Gaza especially, where Hamas enjoys plenty of popular support from all different age groups, suicide terrorism appears to be culturally sanctioned without question, as Hamas flags fly from many homes and workplaces throughout the region, complemented by vast amounts of graffiti celebrating the many suicide bombers and martyrs that have died in the name of Palestine (Davis, 2003, p.108).

## **Socialization: The Education Process:**

Apart from the socializing influence of families and social groups, perhaps the most significant socialization agents are those in the service of educating their citizens; namely schools, governments, and in many cases, the media. These agents of socialization are able to help people to surpass inhibitions to kill others because they often – although in some cases unwittingly – further culturally sanction the path to terrorism.

### *Schooling*

What a person learns while at school about their culture and social values, as well as the world that surrounds them, has a lasting effect that in many cases is carried into adulthood. The school system is able to endorse current social values and thereby perpetuate and solidify such values in the culture for a new generation. One main way the school system is able to indoctrinate, condition, and thus socialize people is through manipulation of what is, and also what is not, learned. This is usually decided by government authorities, and is able to have an enormous effect on a person's view of their own culture as well as the wider world.

While “all nations educate children to learn information that the state believes it is vital for them to know”, educational processes can become “distorted” so that, for example, children are taught falsities about their culture's history – some history teachings may even fail to mention the history of their violence or aggression against other nations, or for that matter, their own military defeats (Zimbardo, 1999). This clearly has an effect on the way in which citizens of a state view themselves and others. Zimbardo (1999) uses Nazi Germany as an example of how governments and government agencies are able to influence and to an extent control the education of its citizens, explaining that some textbooks given to children in particular focussed on perpetuating invented stereotypes of Jews as “the lecherous villain... the heartless landlord... [and] the thieving doctor”. The end of such texts would then instruct the reader on ways in which to help Germany be rid of Jewish people by commanding



“kick them out of your school” or even “expel them from your country” (ibid). From examples like these, it is obvious that such methods of education are important in cultivating hatred and stereotypes of different groups of people, as well as helping to begin the process of dehumanizing an ‘enemy’. In cultures where terrorism and conflict are widespread, then, education can serve as a very important tool for sanctioning violence and thus lowering inhibitions against participating in it. An interesting example of this can be seen in the ‘madrassas’, clandestine religious schools in Pakistan, where many current Islamist militants and militant leaders across the world are known to have studied (Ahmed-Ullah and Barker, 2004). Madrassas are run by “politically powerful clerics” and essentially teach a particular version of Islam and its values that promotes intolerance of others and sanctioning of violence for certain causes. Interestingly, the madrassas are funded by wealthy Muslims from around the world, and teach an estimated 1.5 million people a year (ibid). While some claim that these schools do not teach militant ideas, the madrassas are nonetheless known to be one of Al Qaeda’s main recruiting bases (ibid).

Differing to such an example, the IRA has been, and to a high degree still is, an underground organization, and as such the movement as a whole has not been propagated through the school system. However, the school curriculum in the Republic of Ireland can be viewed at times as a subtle vehicle for nationalism, which can, in conjunction with other forces, give rise to violence. During the mid twentieth century, the education of Irish children was such that it instilled in children a “strong anti-British bias” and taught them little about the conflict and divisions within their own society (Coogan, 2002, p.246). For example, history lessons were essentially composed of teachings about invasions by the English of Ireland, the movements to counter them, and the Irish potato famine, leaving out anything after 1921, and included only a “smattering” of the history of the rest of Europe (ibid, p.246-247). This process of socializing served to devalue the English and consequently led Irish children to grow up believing a very one-sided view of what many believed to be their enemy. In the current school system, it is interesting to note that primary school children are still taught about Wolfe Tone, an Irish cultural hero whose ideas the IRA heavily draws on, as well as other Irish cultural icons such as Michael Collins ([www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie), 2005). In Northern Ireland, the divisions and sectarian tensions are far more acute than in the South, and it is still the norm for Catholic

children to go to Catholic schools and Protestants to Protestant schools, and both perceive their identities and cultures as distinctly different

([www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/educ.htm](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/educ.htm), 2004). This apparent segregation provides the opportunity for ‘us versus them thinking’ to become entrenched, knowingly or unknowingly, from a very young age.

The way in which schools educate young Palestinians clearly plays a role in lowering inhibitions against terrorism. This education process starts when the children are very young; for instance, even in some pre-schools, children get dressed up as suicide bombers for particular activities, while even younger ones are taught to chant previous bombers’ names (Valenty, 2004, p.11). This serves to establish and legitimate particular cultural values, and can often then result in a lowering of inhibitions against certain violent behaviour later on in life. Some primary schools endeavour to carry on practices such as this, serving to entrench the legitimization of terrorism to their students. Palestinian children’s textbooks (written in Egypt and Jordan and distributed to schools by the Palestinian Authority), for example, have taught and reinforced such cultural beliefs through such teachings as “know, my son, that Palestine is your country... that its pure soil is drenched with the blood of martyrs” (Burdman, 2003, p.99). These kinds of teachings culturally sanction martyrdom and help to affirm the cultural belief that Israel belongs to Palestinians, and as such also help to further the release of inhibitions against violence.

Devaluation of Jews is also very much present in such textbooks. In one standard textbook, entitled *Islamic Education for Eighth Grade*, it teaches on the topic of racism that “mankind has suffered from this evil both in ancient as well as modern times, for indeed Satan has, in the eyes of many people, made their actions appear beautiful... such a people are the Jews...” (ibid, p.99). This can affect disinhibition of behaviour as it demonizes Jews by aligning them with satanic forces.

While textbooks distributed after the year 2000 are notably less obvious in their incitement of violence, the newer books still stress how Palestinians have an “obligation to fight and regain” historic Palestine, and at the same time promote the value of martyrdom for the nation on a regular basis (Burdman, 2003, p.100). In addition to textbooks, after the first female Palestinian committed a suicide bombing in 2002, schoolchildren throughout Palestinian areas were instructed to chant the

suicide attackers name at the beginning of classes for some time after her death (Victor, 2003, p.54).

During summer breaks from school, many children in Palestinian areas – some as young as eight – have attended “summer camps”, where they learn about suicide bombers and are taught military drills (Brooks, 2002). According to Burdman (2003), it has been estimated that close to 50,000 children have been enrolled in such camps. The children are dressed up in military uniforms, and older children learn to assemble guns while younger ones recite phrases similar to and including “children of my country... I am the suicide squad” (Burdman, 2003, p.104). Both these summer camps and the school system as a whole appear to be directed by the Palestinian National Authority (Burdman, 2003). In addition to this, Al Najah University in Nablus is very much influenced by its Student Council, which is controlled by members of both Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad (Victor, 2003, p.155). Over 135 suicide bombers have been at one time enrolled in this institution, and it is commonly known throughout Israel to be the “most radical” of Palestinian tertiary institutions (ibid). Growing up around such influences as the ones described above clearly shows how cultural sanctioning of terrorism gradually serves to break down inhibitions against participating in it.

### *Governing Bodies*

The importance of government and government agencies extends further than just its role in schools. One method by which political regimes can educate and socialize their citizens to a particular cause or belief is to evoke feelings of nationalism. By appealing to its citizens in the form of ‘this is in the national interest’, governments and national leaders may be able to elicit new attitudes toward particular issues or questions, especially if there already exists an element of nationalism or patriotism in the culture. Interestingly, and as Bar-Tal (1997) argues, a sense of patriotism “can be found in every ethnographic group that lives in a geographic space” throughout the world (p.246). Combining patriotism with the need for violent action, then, may act as a disinhibitor for terrorist actions. For instance, especially in situations of war or conflict, leaders or governments in general are often able to “socially construct” the nation so that it becomes an “object of... attachment” for much of the populace

(Stern, 1995, p.229). Socializing to particular attitudes or beliefs, then, may be achieved by national leaders through “a long-term investment in parades, holidays, and other collective events that classically condition positive responses to national symbols like flags” (ibid, p.229).

Of course, national leaders’ main avenue to socialize certain attitudes or beliefs in order to permeate a culture is through a campaign of propaganda designed to promote one’s own culture while devaluing others. As above with evoking nationalist attitudes, this is most often used, and is most effective, when mobilizing for war or in times of conflict. The main advantage of propaganda is that it is able to create and permeate through a culture a “universal image of the enemy”, which is reinforced throughout society by way of “posters, cartoons, and magazine illustrations” usually depicting the enemy in dehumanized or demonized terms, for example as a reptile or a “demonic enemy of God” (Waller, 2002, p.248).

Devaluation as a process often frequently develops into being part of a culture, but can vary in its “form and intensity” (Staub, 1999, p.183). A state may educate and socialize their citizens to devalue “different” groups of people, whether those they devalue live in the same national borders or further abroad, or simply just maintain the attitudes and measures of devaluation that already exist within the culture.

Devaluation is important because once it becomes part of a culture,

Its literature, art, and media are perpetuated in social institutions, and, especially once it gives rise to discrimination or other institutionalized forms of antagonism, it becomes highly resistant to change. Even when its public expression is relatively quiescent for a period of time... it often remains part of the deep structure of the culture and can re-emerge when instigating conditions for violence are present (Staub, 1999, p.183-4).

Indeed, as articulated in the previous chapter, devaluation plays a significant part in furthering the disinhibition process as it often helps to advance the dehumanization of particular groups or individual people. In a cultural context, devaluation is usually promulgated by categorization of individuals. Described as a “pervasive cognitive process”, categorizing others as, for instance, simply either “good” or “evil” helps

potential terrorists or terrorist groups to lower their inhibitions against harming others they see as inferior or bad because a detached or dehumanized view of others is made possible. As Moghaddam (2004) notes, “in such contexts, people are not treated as individuals who share characteristics with all humanity... Consequently, the only thing that matters is whether a person is Catholic or Protestant, Black or White, Arab or Israeli, and so on” (p.109).

Apart from the schooling system examined above, many Palestinian leaders themselves have effectively sanctioned terrorism by praising both ‘resistance’ against their Israeli enemy as well as ingraining the moral value of martyrdom. For example, in a public speech directed to Palestinian women and girls early in 2002, Yasser Arafat spoke of the need for what he termed as his “army of roses” to sacrifice themselves in the struggle against Israel, just as Palestinian men had done for decades (Victor, 2003, p.20). He announced that they were “the hope of Palestine” and told them they were to “liberate [their] husbands, fathers, and sons from oppression” by sacrificing themselves for their family and the nation (ibid, p.20). He then coined the phrase “shahida” (the female version of the word martyr or shahid) and began a chant that the crowd listening to him carried on: “shahida all the way to Jerusalem” (ibid). That same day, the first female suicide bomber carried out an attack, and since then at least three others have done the same (Victor, 2003). In addition, Arafat also framed one suicide attack on a Tel Aviv youth disco, in which twelve people lost their lives, as “an act of sacrifice for Allah and for the homeland” (Kimhi and Even, 2004, p.21).

Marwan Barghouti, head of Fatah under Yasser Arafat, also helped to encourage suicide terror in the way that he claimed that Hamas and Islamic Jihad were legitimate organizations in Palestinian culture because of the ‘necessity’ to continue fighting Israel, commenting that these groups were “part of our national liberation movement” (Davis, 2003, p.102) and hence Palestinian governing bodies would not seek to silence them. Barghouti claimed that, even as a Palestinian leader himself, he was “ready to sacrifice” himself for the nation if need be (ibid, p.103). Interestingly, some of those in Arafat’s former government in 2001 were appealing for Hamas to be made part of the Palestinian Authority because of the organization’s popularity among Palestinians (ibid, p.99-100). By making these groups effectively legitimate influencers in Palestinian politics, inhibitions to joining them may further be released

as doing so would be justifiable, perhaps even honourable, as it would be sanctioned by the culture's leadership.

### *Media*

The ability of the mass media in a given society to act as an agent of socialization is also an important cultural influence and helps to further disinhibition toward terrorism. Put simply, in many cases the media is able to instruct people as to "what to think about, how to think about it, sometimes even what to think" (Paletz and Entman, 1981). Generally speaking, political regimes have the power to exert a considerable amount of control over the mass media as a whole (Barner-Barry and Rosenwein, 1985, p.88), indicating that they are able to educate their citizens of all ages on, and then maintain, desired cultural values. While much of the media is to some extent controlled by government forces, especially in terms of issues such as censorship, sometimes particular groups or organizations are able to infiltrate their own journals, magazines or other mediums into mainstream society to get their own message across.

Although the IRA itself does not constitute a political power, its political wing Sinn Fein does, as it maintains a sizeable and consistent political following, albeit more so in the Republic of Ireland. Sinn Fein itself distributes the weekly magazine *An Phoblacht* (or *Republican News*) in both Northern Ireland and the South, having done so since 1970 (Kingston, 1995, p.205-6), and claims it is "Ireland's biggest selling political weekly" with about 15,000 weekly readers ([www.anphoblacht.com](http://www.anphoblacht.com), 2005). Although only a minor percentage of this magazine is dedicated to legitimizing IRA violence, the subject is still "reported regularly" and receives "prominent display" (Picard, 1991, p.96). Much of the publication devotes itself to political news such as pro-Republican speeches and advertisements, or to stories that help in maintaining the perception of 'loyalists' and 'security forces' as victimizers of Catholics and republicans (ibid, p.95). There is also a section, though only a small percentage of the publication, that extols martyrdom, where obituaries and commemorations of former IRA and Sinn Fein members are listed (ibid, p.95).

Differing quite substantially from Ireland, the Palestinian media is essentially controlled by Palestinian governing bodies and appears, in terms of television especially, not only to sanction violence toward Israelis but in some instances clearly acts as a “directive for children toward violence” (Burdman, 2003, p.103). For example, clips aired on Palestinian Authority-controlled television stations included an interview with adolescent girls waving Palestinian flags while one girl states that children must pull together “to expel the enemy Israel... we on our own, the children, the boys and girls, will go and kill them, on our own, murder them, shoot them all. Just give us weapons” (ibid, p.103). As well as this, all farewell videos prepared by suicide bombers are broadcast on television after the suicide attack has taken place (Brooks, 2002). Additionally, many television programmes also serve to exalt martyrdom. For instance, a cartoon for younger children shows how becoming a martyr makes a person “stronger and powerful” (Victor, 2003, p.180). In this cartoon, a child is throwing stones at Israeli soldiers and is then shot and killed by them. Later, at his grave, a small white flower grows, purportedly a ‘symbol of rebirth’ – as this flower fades, the boy reappears, but this time with an exceptionally large rock instead of the stones he had previously. The narrator’s voice then cuts in and explains how the child has found “the perfect moment of unity” in paradise due to him dying a martyr’s death by fighting Israelis (Victor, 2003, p.180).

Aside from television, popular newspapers and other widely distributed publications also at times culturally sanction terrorist activities. An interesting example can be found in the death notices of suicide bombers. Much of the time these notices use euphemistic language to describe the deaths, and as such these deaths are reported as weddings with God. For example, many read like this one : “with great pride, the PIJ marries the member of its military wing... the martyr and hero Yasser Al-Adhami, to the ‘black-eyed’” (Feldner, 2001; cited in Moghadam, 2003, p.73), the ‘black-eyed’ being a reference to the beautiful virgins male suicide bombers believe they will receive once in paradise.

### **Historical Cultural Myths and Cultural Ideologies:**

The previous two sections of this chapter have shown that socialization agents, such as the family and the school system, are imperative in creating a belief system that can be sustained through generations. Cultural belief systems are therefore formed to a great extent by socialization, and inhibitions against undertaking terrorism can be surpassed due to the influence socialization has on culturally sanctioning such activities. However, belief systems are also molded by historical cultural myths and are very much linked to cultural ideologies. This section of the chapter explains and analyses these two concepts and their relation to culture as a disinhibitor of violent behaviour.

#### *Historical Myths*

Historical myths exist in every culture throughout the world. As Bennett (1980) states, “every political system has a collection of myths that illustrate how the nation was founded, the principles it stands for, the qualities of its heroes, the strengths of its people, and the wisdom of its laws and institutions” (p.259). An historical cultural myth has been defined as a “sacred story or an interpretation of history that tells how something important came into being or what it stands for (Bennett, 1980, p.259). Much of what people learn about hate and enmity is achieved through such kinds of stories: “stories tend to have two fairly stable roles: perpetrator (who is to be hated) and victim (who is to be the hater)” (Sternberg, 2003). Cultural myths are important disinhibitors of violent behaviour because they provide the opportunity for members of a culture to dehumanize and devalue other groups of people while promoting and validating their own superiority (Bennett, 1980). The resulting attitudes and beliefs about others from this process of dehumanization can be instilled in a culture and perpetuated through to later generations because “language becomes a powerful cultural weapon as it portrays entire groups of people as sub, or not quite, human” (Hirsch, 1985, p.44). As well as this, cultural myths often seek to explain where a culture or nation comes from, and as such, these cultural myths often “hold that the members of the group or the state descend from divine origins, or are protected by divine intervention” (ibid, p.44). To illustrate this, Hirsch gives the example of



Nazism and its Aryan mythology, commenting that their appeals to Christianity and “ideas of blood and soil” helped to justify notions of German supremacy (1985, p.44-45).

While myths are able to elicit and sanction particular attitudes or beliefs, they are also important because they “create a powerful sense of group identification” (Stern, 1995, p.230). Although this topic of groups and group identification is covered in much greater depth in chapter six of this thesis, it is necessary to mention it here, as cultural myths are also significant in creating an awareness of national identity and national consciousness. This may therefore heighten feelings of nationalism, which may prove to be important in disinhibiting violent behaviour, especially in cases where terrorism is justified by perpetrators as in the name of the nation or national liberation.

The taking up of arms for Ireland has been a celebrated and cherished occupation in Irish history (Heskin, 1980, p.85). This has been made possible to a large extent by the importance that historical myths play in Irish culture. The main myth that exists in the Irish psyche, and that forms the main philosophy for the IRA, is the legacy of the 1916 Easter Rising and its proclamation of independence for the Irish Republic. In the Rising, Irish republicans revolted against British forces, but were “violently suppressed” by British soldiers, and the organizers of the revolt were executed soon after (Alonso, 2001, p.132). The leader of this revolt was Patrick Pearse, and the uprising included such other important names in Irish history as James Connolly, Eamonn De Valera, and Michael Collins (Coogan, 2002). Those executed in the revolt therefore became ‘martyrs’ and heroes, idolised by much of the Irish culture, and the myth of the 1916 rebellion has essentially proved to have “exerted a decisive influence on the republican mentality” for generations to come (Alonso, 2001, p.132). Gerry Adams himself, in the mid 1980s, stated that the IRA of the present day “takes its historical and organizational origins from the forces which engaged in the Easter Rising of 1916” (Adams, 1986; cited in Arthur, 1997, p.242). Indeed, as Kinsella (1994) writes, “those engaged in the revolutionary struggle feel no distance between themselves and the ‘hayros’ of the past. There is an intimate identification on the part of those who are fighting in the present with those who have fallen” (p.24-25).

Similarly, cultural myths in the case of Palestinian suicide bombers tend to focus on “one of the Palestinians’ most heralded martyrs” (Davis, 2003, p.100), Izzedine al Qassam, and the events of 1948, in which the State of Israel formally came into being. These cultural myths have helped to inform and maintain the cultural ideologies that now permeate Palestinian society and consequently the militant groups that exist within it.

Izzedine al Qassam was born in Syria and educated in Egypt early on in the twentieth century (Davis, 2003, p.100). He “claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad” and often preached at mosques in Haifa, where in the 1920s he started to recruit men to join his already existing brigades of soldiers who were fighting the British Army and Jewish settlers in Palestine (ibid, p.100-101). He died in a confrontation with British soldiers in 1935 but left behind him a significant amount of Palestinian guerrilla cells which had been and continued to be relatively successful in targeting the British and Jewish settlers (ibid, p.100-101). His ‘martyrdom’ helped to create and later reinforce within the Palestinian culture a tradition of resistance, as he is known as the hero that “raised the banner of armed struggle instead of passive resistance” (Abu-Amr, 1994, p.99). His status as hero and martyr has been shown in the way that the military arm of Hamas was named after him, and is called “the Brigades of the Martyr Izzedine al Qassam” (ibid, p.100).

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 is known to the Palestinians as the “nakbah”, or catastrophe (Nabulsi, 2003, p.481). To Palestinians of that generation, the creation of Israel sticks in their memory as a time of “devastation and total rupture of Palestinian society” (ibid, p.481), while in the current generation the myths that have grown out of and surround that era, and the 1967 war, construct the base of their legitimization of violence. For example, one imprisoned Palestinian terrorist argued that “the war and my refugee status were the seminal events that formed by political consciousness”, stating that this situation itself saw him try and do everything in his power to “regain our legitimate rights” (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.182). Those that died as a result of the wars are held up as national heroes and idolized for future generations, in the same way as Qassam appears to be. One other cultural myth that circulates throughout Palestinian culture that is connected with the creation of Israel is the fictional *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This publication has served

as a justification for resistance particularly within Palestinian areas because it aims to confirm “the existence of a world Jewish conspiracy” to rule over all, especially since the publication lays out the fact that this will be staged from and based in Israel itself (Harkabi, 1971, p.230). Palestinian culture as a whole is aware of this apparent conspiracy, as it is studied in numerous mosques, schools, and in within the terror groups themselves as a way of justifying the need to fight against the Israelis.

Historical myths, then, are able to provide a background for the disinhibition of violence because they highlight a culture’s values, and therefore sanction these values and their achievement. In the case of the IRA and Palestinian suicide bombers, it appears that such myths play a vital role in their justification and rationalization of violence against others.

### *Cultural Ideologies*

Historical myths are inextricably linked to cultural ideologies. As Baumeister (1997) writes, those with a strong “ideological passion” for their cause often “assimilate their enemies” into such historical myths (p.185). Ideologies, according to Gerring (1997) are a “set of beliefs, values, principles, attitudes and/or ideals” and are often associated with a “deep, passionate, or emotional sort of commitment” (p.967 and 977). In addition, Gerring characterizes ideology as being able to substantially guide political behaviour and thus also legitimate certain political actions (ibid, p.967 and 972).

Cultural ideologies are particularly significant, then, when analysing terrorist psychology because of the way in which certain ideologies are able to legitimate different acts and beliefs depending on the values that the ideology consists of. In other words, certain ideologies can be interpreted by some as providing a moral justification for terrorism. This is because ideologies are powerful in the way that they are able to provide a sense of meaning as well as a sense of direction to a persons life, whether this is in a positive or a negative way (Waller, 2002, p.183), as well as being able to define how members of a culture view the world around them (Drake, 1998).

In addition to this, cultural ideologies may often be centred on hatred of another group of people and are “communicated through laws and courts, social learning, and propaganda distributed by the mass media” (Waller, 2002, p.184), indicating how socialization practices and the adoption of ideologies are inherently linked. Nazi ideology is an illustration of this idea, as it has been noted that from its inception in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, the ideology was able to sweep through the majority of the culture and become the dominant ideology by the late 1930s – thus, “perpetrators of extraordinary evil drew on this overarching ideology to justify and support their atrocities” (Waller, 2002, p.185).

Ideology as a whole has also been shown to be a vital element for disinhibiting terrorist actions because it can help in releasing inhibitions about killing civilian populations in addition to military and political targets. In this way, ideology provides a “prism through which they [terrorists] view events and the actions of other people... ideology also allows terrorists to justify their violence by displacing the responsibility onto either the victims or other actors” (Drake, 1998). On top of this, cultural ideologies also allow the perpetrators to see their victims as “representative symbols” rather than as people (Drake, 1998), which in turn creates psychological distance for the attackers from their victims. Cultural ideologies, therefore, may be able to explain “how being a member of a particular religion or race can make someone a target for attacks without the victim or victims seeming to have done anything blameworthy” (Drake, 1998).

Aside from religious ideologies, which are examined in the next chapter, one of the main cultural ideologies that exists in many different nations throughout the world is that of a nationalist ideology. For this thesis especially, in light of its two illustrative cases, nationalism – while also a motivator for violence – is an important disinhibitor of terrorism because it evokes and sanctions such culturally important concepts as martyrdom and self-sacrifice in the name of the nation (Kelman, 1997).

Nationalist ideologies are theorized to be so effective at shaping the beliefs and influencing the actions of citizens because they draw on the human inclination to “identify with, learn from, and favour groups to which one has strong emotional ties” (Stern, 1995). Self-sacrifice for the nation, then, can be elicited by the “forces of

cultural evolution”, which are fuelled by capitalising on the “strong and pervasive human propensities for social learning” (ibid, p.227). In other words, if a culture values and teaches that the nation is more important than anything else, a strong sense of loyalty can be cultivated, including to the extreme of martyrdom, because “group membership and identification can exert strong forces on behaviour” (Stern, 1995, p.225).

For both the IRA and the Irish culture generally, the overarching ideology is one of nationalism, where the main focus is on removing British influence from Irish affairs and Irish land. Forcing the English out of Ireland is more often than not viewed by a significant part of the culture as feasible only through armed resistance (Smith, 1995). Such ideology is framed around and draws on the cultural myth examined above, as well as even further back with Wolfe Tone and his 1798 attempted revolt (Coogan, 2002), and the failed rebellion of 1848 where both Catholics and Protestants joined together to fight the English (Bell, 1992, p.71; Wright, 1990, p.27). Indeed, the history of Irish nationalism and resistance as a cultural ideology can also be seen as far back as the beginning of the fourteenth century, when Irish chiefs requested and received an army of Scottish troops to help them drive out the English from their lands at the start of what was known as the “Gaelic resurgence” in Ireland (Cronin, 1980, p.5). Because much of Irish ideology sees the English, or more generally the British, as an oppressor and usurper of Irish land and culture, it is easy to see how members of the IRA and republican sympathizers in general are able to come to view their enemy in dehumanized terms, as the cultural ideology allows them to view enemies as “symbols rather than... flesh and blood human beings” (Drake, 1998).

Irish nationalism as a cultural ideology has been used by the IRA to encourage and legitimate martyrdom for the nation, echoing what national hero Patrick Pearse claimed before he was executed after the Easter Rising: “life springs from death and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations” (Alonso, 2001, p.132). This phrase remains “deeply embedded” through Irish political culture and forms the ideological basis for Irish republicans and sympathizers, and consequently for the IRA as well (Toolis, 1995). The extent to which martyrdom is exalted in Irish culture can be seen through funerals for IRA members who have died “in the cause of Irish Freedom” (Toolis, 1995, p.337). At one funeral in particular, thousands of

people came to pay their respects to the fallen IRA man, including schoolchildren who came to the service bearing roses, one for each year of the dead man's life (ibid, p.337). His friends and peers recited poems at the funeral written about Irish nationalism and martyrdom, and in the days before the funeral hundreds of local people from Northern Ireland crossed the border to visit his family (ibid, p.337). In the months following the funeral a committee managed to raise the sum of five thousand pounds from donations for an enormous headstone for the IRA man's grave (ibid, p.337).

Quite similar to the Irish example, Palestinian culture also draws heavily on a nationalistic ideology with much emphasis on martyrdom, with cultural heroes such as Qassam playing a large role in this. As Kimhi and Even (2004) write, there appears to be a "sympathetic atmosphere... that reveres self-sacrifice" within Palestinian culture (p.18-19). This ideology of nationalism and martyrdom is reinforced through activities such as "building monuments, naming a football tournament after a suicide terrorist, public assemblies at schools in memory of suicide bombers, [and] distribution of the cassette made by the suicide bombers before the attack" (ibid, p.20). Such nationalism is connected to as well as intensified by what is seen by most as the "overwhelming sense of humiliation" felt at the hands of Israelis since 1948 (Moghadam, 2003, p.74). As Musa Ziada, a would-be suicide bomber who was stopped by the Palestinian police, noted about joining Hamas, "it was not difficult to be convinced" about becoming a martyr because he "had thought about it a lot before" (Battersby, 1995). The ideology of fighting and dying for the homeland can be seen through instances such as funeral processions for 'martyred' Palestinians, when the dead are carried through the streets amidst thousands of supporters crying out nationalist slogans glorifying the suicide bomber and those of the past while flying Palestinian flags (Victor, 2003).

The role of ideology and violence in the name of the nation in Palestinian culture is starkly obvious when one considers polls from over the years on popular support for violence and, by the same token, martyrdom. In a poll taken in 2001 by the Palestinian Centre for Public Opinion, 70% of Palestinians said they supported suicide attacks, while in 2002 over two thirds of those asked said that they supported 'martyrdom' operations, including suicide bombings (Moghadam, 2003, p.76). After

2000, terrorist groups are shown to have received more support shortly after each suicide attack was perpetrated, while in 2003 support for suicide attacks fluctuated between sixty and sixty-five percent (Bloom, 2004). Indeed, between April 1997 and October 2003, the lowest percentage support for suicide operations was in May of 1997 when it was at 24%, and the highest percentage of support was in September of 2001, when it reached 85% (ibid), demonstrating how support for suicide terrorism has been able to permeate itself through Palestinian culture in a relatively short space of time. In this way, it may well be true that “one can only understand the lone suicide bomber by considering the larger context from which he or she emerges and is often lauded as a martyr” (Moghaddam, 2004, p.117).

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter has sought to show the ways in which a person’s culture and resulting belief system can help to justify violent behaviour against other human beings. Although in most cases terrorism is perpetrated and defended by only a small majority of a culture, what people are brought up to believe about themselves and the world around them certainly does significantly affect their ability to justify and rationalize violence against other people. Indeed, as Moghaddam (2004) argues, “the most effective approach to understanding terrorism is through cultural and collective rather than [a] dispositional and individualistic analysis” (p.104). The “prearrival” stage to joining a terrorist group and participating in their activities, which can often occur through immersion in a particular culture, greatly affects a person’s beliefs about participating in violence, and is especially important if the particular culture socializes attitudes conducive to justifying violence. As Valenty (2004) argues, “the selection process [for terrorist organizations] is one that seeks out the individuals who have been best socialized to take on the goals and values of the organization itself” (p.12). This chapter has demonstrated, through an examination of socialization, education, and cultural myths and ideologies, the extent to which culture can play a role in the disinhibition of terrorism. Through socialization, a person learns the ways of the culture through their family members, communities and social groups.

Specifically, a person learns about appropriate behaviours for different situations, and about the world outside of their own culture. Once at school, this socialization process is heightened, and is further bolstered by government teachings and the messages of the media. Adding to this, the cultural myths that permeate through a society and the ideologies that are linked to them also serve as agents of disinhibition. This process results in cultural sanctioning of violent actions, and due to this, inhibitions against perpetrating terrorism are reduced because there appears to be a moral justification to undertaking violence, which helps to let terrorists affirm their belief in the rightness and justness of their cause and the means to achieve their objectives.



## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **RELIGION**

Though its emphasis has fluctuated throughout the history of terrorism, religion is often a major feature in the ideologies and backgrounds of terrorist groups worldwide. From the Zealots and Sicari (Jewish sects who fought against their Roman occupiers) to Al Qaeda, aspects of religion have been used to justify violence and cruelty against other human beings, including acts of terrorism, for centuries. Closely linked to culture in many instances, the impact of religion in rationalizing acts of terror is one of the most obvious ways in which inhibitions against killing can be overcome. This chapter therefore examines how religion has become a main feature of both past and contemporary terrorist groups' justifications for violence while also analysing its ability to surpass inhibitions to kill other human beings. Consequently, the chapter includes an examination of the role that religion can play in encouraging dehumanization and demonization, as well as how it may allow diffusion of responsibility to help justify violence. It will therefore also include a discussion of how notions such as the 'just war' theory and interpretations of 'jihad' help in sanctioning terrorism. In line with previous chapters, it additionally draws on examples from the Irish Republican Army and Palestinian suicide terrorism to give further validity to its arguments.

## **The Prominence of Religion in Terrorism:**

As stated in the first chapter of this thesis, what is being labelled as the ‘new terrorism’ of the 1980s-1990s is terrorism which is predominantly religious in nature. That is, it involves terrorist groups who follow a certain set of religious beliefs and values and are guided by the accompanying religious aims and objectives, and who justify much of their violence in the name of their faith. While the importance of religion in political life is noted to have resurged with the Iranian Islamic revolution in the late 1970s (Juergensmeyer, 2004, p.36), examples of religious terrorism since this time have steadily increased, and by the mid-1990s had “exploded” to include terrorism perpetrated around the world by followers from almost every religion (Juergensmeyer, 2000a, p.158). The 1993 World Trade Centre attacks, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the activities of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and India, Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, and Hamas in Israel, as well as assassinations of such important political figures as Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin (Rapoport, 2001; Juergensmeyer, 2000a), for instance, all show how different religions have come into play in the phenomenon of terrorism. Indeed, in a 1998 United States government list of the thirty most “dangerous” rebel groups throughout the world, over fifteen were religious in nature, comprising a range of beliefs including Buddhism, Judaism and Islam (Juergensmeyer, 2000a, p.158).

While religious terrorism has thus ostensibly emerged with force over the last twenty years, it should be noted that religion has waxed and waned as a key element over the course of the history of terrorism. For example, religion was used as the chief justification for terror during an early spate of terrorism in the period between 1880 and World War One; however this trend declined significantly after this period (Rapoport, 2001). Religion as a justification for terrorism was not overtly observed again, though it was noted to appear to a smaller extent during the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, until this most recent resurgence appeared the world over after the end of the Cold War (ibid). As described above, religious terrorism has come from a wide variety of groups, and this latest resurgence has highlighted how this kind of religious-inspired terrorism is also able to transcend state borders because of

its ability to appeal to a wider audience – for example, members and allies of Al Qaeda are known to stretch from the Middle East to Africa to Asia, whilst also having sympathizers and financiers worldwide (Radu, 2002).

While a brief account of the impact of religion as a significant ideology in terrorism is necessary to begin this chapter, it is equally as necessary to examine why this most recent resurgence of religious terrorism came into being after the end of the Cold War and still continues today. According to most scholarly research, the main explanation for the current revival in using religion to justify violence is the effects of modernization and globalization after the Cold War period. Globalization has seen an enormous amount of changes take place in many, if not all, societies as well as the international system as a whole (Ranstorp, 1996). These changes have been social, economic, and political in nature, and in some nations the changes have been on an immense scale. Indeed, Juergensmeyer (2004) argues that a number of the most “intense movements for ethnic and religious nationalism” have come about in reaction to feeling a sense of exploitation about their role, or lack thereof, in the global economy (p.37). On top of this, many terrorist groups that have emerged harbour grievances and fears about the rise of multicultural societies and its effects on their own cultures, as well as suspicion and frustration about particular US foreign policies, especially those they perceive as helping to prop up certain regimes they see as corrupt (ibid, p.37).

Essentially, the globalization and modernization of the world has exacerbated the “dissolution of traditional links of social and cultural cohesion within and between societies”, which in turn has caused a “sense of crisis” in many communities and societies because of threats this has created to their continued existence and identity (Ranstorp, 1996). This sense of crisis has in many cases seen societies look back to their pasts and to “their own cultural resources” (Juergensmeyer, 1996). Indeed, as Juergensmeyer (1996) writes, “politicized religious movements are the responses of those who feel desperate and desolate in the current geopolitical crisis. The problem that they experience is not with God, but with politics, and with their profound perceptions that the moral and ideological pillars of social order have collapsed”. Hence, terrorism in the name of religion may often be seen as justified by religious

groups because it is perceived as the moral thing to do in order to correct the ills of both society and the world of today.

### **Culture and Religion:**

For the purposes of this chapter, the term ‘religion’ will be characterized as a particular set of beliefs and practices that a group of people follow which are based on the teachings of the leader and/or deity of that particular faith. In many societies, both past and present, the importance of religion remains tightly intertwined with culture. As Lincoln (2003) argues, religion is often a “central component” of many cultures because it has the ability to “stabilize vital human concerns by constituting them as transcendent” (p.56). In most cases, “religion provides the identity that makes a community cohere and links it with a particular place” (Juergensmeyer, 1996), and may often form the dominant cultural ideology of a nation, as in the situation of Iran. As well as this, many cultural myths for different nations are religious in nature, where in some cases the land a culture lives on is said to be “based on divine intervention” which serves to result in “divine protection” for those that inhabit it. In other cases, the people living in a certain area mythologize themselves to be descendents of God or Gods (Hirsch, 1985, p.44). For example, Palestinian Islamist groups believe that Palestine is an Islamic land “consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgement Day” and that “it, or any part of it, should not be squandered; it, or any part of it, should not be given up” ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). In this way, it can be seen that culture often serves to sanction certain religious beliefs, and vice versa, thereby gradually lowering inhibitions against participating in particular activities or undertaking certain actions.

Indeed, nowhere is this joining of culture and religion more clearly observed than in cultures with Islam as the predominant religion, as Islamic law itself does not recognize a separation between religion and politics. Called the *Shari’a*, Islamic law “governs all aspects of life – political, social, and cultural”, and includes rules about when and how people should engage in war against others (Robins and Post, 1997,

p.148). In this way, it is able to permeate through a culture so that religious law becomes the dominant societal influence. This can be seen today in many cultures, for example in Palestinian areas, as well as Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. In fact, religious symbols throughout such cultures are very easily found. In the case of the Palestinians, for example, one of the main cultural symbols is the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock. A perceived assault on this is widely acknowledged to have set off the 2000 intifada (Hammami and Tamari, 2001, p.13). As well as this, Sheik Yassin, the former spiritual leader of militant religious group Hamas, was said to be “an important and honoured figure in Gaza”, being held in high regard by both Yasser Arafat and among less religious Palestinians (Laqueur, 1999, p.138). Even after his death, Sheik Yassin still remains an important cultural figure. Adding to this, most, if not all, acts of suicide terror are usually done both in the name of Palestine and God (Victor, 2003; Davis, 2003), emphasizing the extent to which religion makes up a significant part of the culture and its identity.

Apart from Islamic societies, religion as the main foundation to culture can also be seen in the Northern Irish conflict, where the conflict itself is actually framed in terms of Catholic versus Protestant, Protestants especially seeing religion as central to the conflict (Juergensmeyer, 2000b). Indeed, in Northern Ireland particularly, a person's identity is based on which faith he or she adheres to – Catholicism or Protestantism. Hence, religion as a whole does play a large part in determining the culture of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. For example, it has been argued that in Irish culture, both north and south, nationalism and religion are essentially comparable to a pair of lungs as “one could scarcely exist without both, and not at all without at least one” (ibid, p.42). The IRA itself, through the activities of its political wing Sinn Fein, have tried to encourage a revival of ‘Catholic culture’ in Northern Ireland, while at the same time Protestant leaders have been encouraging ‘Protestant culture’. Due in part to this, it is claimed that the violence is thus “related to the renewed role that religion has come to play in Northern Ireland's public life” (Juergensmeyer, 2000b, p.43).

The above examples show the extent to which religion can constitute a substantial part of a nation's culture. In this way, cultural practices can, and do – as demonstrated

in the previous chapter – serve to socially sanction religion and many of the ideas associated with it.

### **The Psychology of Religion:**

The remainder of this chapter discusses and analyses how religion has the ability to be a powerful disinhibitor for terrorism. As Rapoport (1992) points out, religion has an “essential violence-reducing element”, but at the same time also has a “violence-producing” element that is said to be “equally” as essential (p.118). While religion is, then, for most people often one of the greatest inhibitors for not undertaking violence, it can also be in certain situations both a motivator for terrorist actions as well as an important disinhibitor of them. Indeed, it is able to aid in the disinhibition process in terrorism for a number of different and significant reasons.

For instance, religion, by its very nature, has the capability to “inspire ultimate commitment” (Rapoport, 1992, p.119). In other words, it has the capacity to induce people into sacrificing themselves for a cause. It can and does “command” loyalty on behalf of its followers, even more so than appeals to nationalism. Due to this ability to inspire such an intense level of commitment, it is also able to trigger powerful emotional responses, especially in times of conflict or war (ibid, p.121). Interestingly, Rapoport (1992) notes that in terrorist groups whose ideology and justification are primarily religious, violence is known to be significantly more “deadly” and intense (p.121). This finding was concluded after one of Rapoport’s earlier studies comparing religious and secular terror groups over the course of history, where it was found that even though some secular groups were more advanced in some areas, such as technology, religious terror groups fought longer and more injurious conflicts (ibid, p.121).

Indeed, due to the ability of religion to bring about intense feelings of loyalty and commitment, religious language is often used, usually in a “manipulative” fashion, even by the non-religious to arouse emotions and emotional attachment for their

cause. For example, the group Fatah of the PLO (a secular organization), whose name itself means “a conquest for Islam” open all their military statements with “in the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate” (Rapoport, 1992, p.124).

### *Apocalyptic Thinking and Cosmic Dualism*

Religion also helps to disinhibit violence because it invokes a high level of apocalyptic thinking. While the three major revealed religions – Christianity, Islam, and Judaism – all highlight the coming of the messiah, judgement day, and so forth, a smaller yet significant minority within these religions justify their violence by claiming they can “hasten the arrival of the messiah” by undertaking certain actions, including those violent in nature (Robins and Post, 1997, p.146). Indeed, it has been noted that while apocalyptic thinking by groups and organizations cannot by itself be the main reason for religious violence, it does however at least generate “an atmosphere conducive to the legitimization of violence”, and can therefore act as a crucial condition for disinhibiting violent behaviour (Mayer, 2001, p.368-369). This way of thinking may also justify “unlimited violence” in the way that it often results in people viewing themselves, as well as their “cause”, as “wholly righteous”, and in some cases can lead people to view themselves as gods (Rapoport, 1987, p.84).

Apocalyptic, or messianic, justifications for violence usually entail heightened and more “brutal” acts of violence than violence in the name of other causes, as believers tend to see themselves at war with governing authorities or those who are perceived as having “corrupted” the religion, and accordingly the believer feels they are entitled to “respond in kind” to such enemies (Rapoport, 1992). Many of those who act in the name of religion believe that the “messianic process” has commenced already (ibid, p.133), and perceive that their own violent actions are helping to spur the process on further. In this way, such people are uninhibited when it comes to perpetrating violence as they believe that what they are doing is religiously sanctioned and thus also morally justified.

Apocalyptic thinking is present within Palestinian Islamist terrorist groups to a notable extent. For example, the Hamas organization interpret and teach that certain chapters and passages in the Koran state that Allah promises to send people to kill the Jews living on Islamic land until the ‘Day of Resurrection’ ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com),

2004). In framing the Israeli state as one based on oppression and an Islamic one as just, Hamas also argues that “states built upon oppression last only one hour, states based upon justice will last until the hour of Resurrection” ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). In this way, destruction of the oppressive state of Israel paves the way for a just Islamic Palestinian state. Once an oppressive state is destroyed, then, this can be interpreted to mean that a just one may be believed to set the messianic process in motion. While in this case it may seem this can be construed as a motive for terrorism, it is also a significant disinhibitor because people may attach a moral justification for using violence, in that it will help bring about a new era, and that those who participate in terrorism are undertaking such actions for the benefit of all.

Closely tied to apocalyptic thinking is what is termed “cosmic dualism” (Larsson, 2004, p.113). Cosmic dualism, and the resulting construction of a cosmic war, occurs when religious followers view a conflict not “in ordinary human terms” but as a conflict about something far greater and far more ancient – a battle between good and evil (Mayer, 2001, p.369). If people view their conflicts in this manner, it is almost a given that the conflict will take on violent characteristics, as in many cases such cosmic wars are perceived as endorsed by God and hence restraints over certain actions will not be seen as necessary, or will at least significantly weaken (ibid, p.369; Rapoport, 1987), as the ends are often seen as justifying the means in such situations. Juergensmeyer (1996) notes that the process of psychologically constructing a cosmic war begins as soon as an “enemy of religion has been identified”.

Essentially, in a cosmic war, believers are fighting for their version of religious truth, whatever it may be (Larsson, 2004, p.114). As such, cosmic dualism is absolute in that it sees the world in terms of “truth versus untruth”, which then gives rise to such religious concepts as holy war and jihad (ibid, p.115). As well as this, it is worth noting that because a cosmic war is framed in terms of good and evil or God versus Satan, compromise between the warring sides is doubtful, usually because “those who suggest a negotiated settlement are as excoriated as the enemy” (Juergensmeyer, 2000b, p.154), as good cannot compromise with evil just as truth cannot compromise with untruth. When situations are framed in such oversimplified terms, inhibitions against violence become weakened, as moral justifications for violence are more



easily rationalized and the perception of the ‘enemy’ becomes very one-dimensional and allows distorted views of such enemies to come to the fore.

The Palestine Islamic Jihad provides an interesting example of this belief in a cosmic war. Essentially, this group believes that a correct interpretation of both history and the Koran shows that “Palestine is the focus of the religio-historical confrontation between the Muslims and their eternal enemies, the Jews” (Litvak, 2002). At the crux of this conflict is the belief that followers of Islam “represent the forces of truth” while their enemies represent “the forces of apostasy”, and believe that jihad against their enemies is thus necessary and morally justified, for both Palestinians as a people and Islam as a religion (ibid). The Hamas organization appear to concur with this viewpoint as a basis for their violence, as they too argue that they, as followers of Islam, are the bearers of the truth and will therefore “spare no effort to implement” it in order to “abolish evil” ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). Indeed, Hamas leaders have often hinted that the Palestinian struggle against Israelis was an “expression of a larger, hidden struggle” (Juergensmeyer, 2000b, p.76). Their jihad against the Jews, who are described as mischievous, cunning, and “corrupted”, is said to be endorsed by God, and as proof of this Jewish evilness their “termination” by way of Muslims’ fighting in the name of God and truth is said to be foretold by the Koran ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004).

### *Demonization*

Once the believer perceives themselves to be part of a cosmic war with identifiable enemies, inhibitions to kill are further released as the process of demonizing such enemies is heightened. This is because the ‘enemy’ in a cosmic war has “no redeeming features”, so is therefore continually seen as the opposite of the ‘good’ side, which inevitably is ‘evil’ (Larsson, 2004). Berlet (2004) writes that demonization is an important concept to note when thinking about the justification of violence as the processes associated with it allow “no acknowledgement of complexity, nuance or ambiguity in debates” and promote “hostility toward those who suggest coexistence, toleration, pragmatism, compromise or mediation” with those they deem to be inherently ‘evil’. Commonly, the demonizing of an enemy involves depicting people as devils, witches, perhaps even “fallen angels” (Keen,

1986, p.109). It also helps to fuel what was mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis about the ‘myth of pure evil’. Importantly, demonizing the enemy also helps to bring about another mechanism of disinhibition mentioned in the third chapter, that of attribution of blame. As Baumeister (1999) writes,

A less obvious but still very powerful benefit of demonizing the enemy is that all the misfortunes and suffering on both sides can be blamed on the enemy. If there is conflict, then of course it must be blamed on evil, for the good side would never seek out or desire conflict. What the good side suffers is the fault of the evil side. By the same token, whatever the evil side suffers is also its own fault, because it brought it on itself by means of its evil activities (p.86)

While demonization in many cases occurs outside of religion, it has special relevance to religious violence and terrorism in the way that it is usually linked to situations where there is perceived conflict between the followers of God and those of the Devil. An excellent example of this can be found in Iran, where the Ayatollah Khomeini once labelled the United States of America the “Great Satan”, a phrase since which time has spread to other parts of the Islamic world as the main label for the country, and has been used as a basis for legitimating hatred and violence against the people that live there in recent years (Juergensmeyer, 1996).

### *Religious Doctrines*

While religion may be able to justify violence through apocalyptic thinking and/or belief in a cosmic war, religion may also sanction violence due to certain interpretations of religious doctrines, for example, those such as ‘holy war’ (or ‘just war’) and jihad. Often used as a justification for fighting a cosmic war, these concepts have been employed as part of religious rationalizations for violence, including terrorism, throughout history. Both the Islamist concept of ‘jihad’ and the Christian conception of ‘just war’ theory will be discussed in this section due to their relevance to the cases examined in the thesis.

The just war theory, though often used by states secular in nature today, is derived from centuries-old Christian theory, dating back as far as the Middle Ages, in which certain criteria were set out to explain when violence and war could be made use of

(Gopin, 2000). Essentially, the just war theory provides guidelines for when war may be “permissible or obligatory” by Christians (*jus ad bellum*) as well as a set of rules for behaviour and conduct once a war has begun (*jus in bello*) (Gopin, 2000, p.232). The criteria for Christians to enter or begin a war effectively hinges on whether the war has been called for by a “competent authority”, whether it has “just cause”, in that it needs to be a war of either self-defence or in “protection of one’s rights”, and whether the intentions for the war are just (Silverman, 2002). Once part of a war, the theory dictates that non-combatants and other non-military targets must be left alone, while the means through which the war is fought must be proportionate to the state’s ends, and not excessive in nature (Silverman, 2002). As well as this, the ‘just war’ thesis also allows violence if “force” is the only option left for “effecting change”, but notes that “reconciliation must be sought as the ultimate end” (The Joint Group on Social Questions, 1976, p.61). Attaching such a sense of morality to the undertaking of violence in particular situations certainly has an effect on lowering inhibitions against terrorism. In other words, if a person deems violent actions to be sanctioned under the just war theory, by justifying their actions as “holy war”, any guilt or restraint they may have felt previously about partaking in terrorism is likely to have significantly lowered because view their actions as highly morally justified, while at the same time are able to hold no apparent empathy for their victims.

Due to its prevalence in terrorism today, as well as its relation to religious violence in general, the concept of jihad in Islam and the accompanying idea of “shahadat” (martyrdom) are also necessary to examine. The term jihad basically translates as a “struggle”, and can “refer to everything from striving to be a better person to waging war on behalf of God” (Silverman, 2002). Interestingly, the conditions under which jihad may be utilized are close to that of both the Jewish and Christian rules of war, in that jihad must be a defensive action and must be intended to “redress an unjust action” (ibid). In addition to this, for jihad to be just, the person undertaking it is forbidden from responding to an aggressor in a “greater manner than he received” (ibid). The Prophet Muhammad is said to have distinguished between two types of jihad, these being the lesser jihad and the greater jihad (Esposito, 2002, p.28). The lesser jihad is the violent type of jihad, in which wars are fought and people killed, while the greater jihad is a different and far more crucial type of struggle, and is a struggle against “one’s ego, selfishness, greed, and evil” (ibid, p.28). Martyrs in the

Islamic tradition of jihad are held in extremely high regard. Indeed, the Koran devotes a significant amount of time to extolling the value of martyrdom, with many passages containing messages similar to and including, “never think that those who are killed in the way of God are dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for” (Esposito, 2002, p.33). As much of today’s Islamic terrorism is framed in the view that acts of violence are done for God, hence “killed in the way of God”, it becomes easier to see how people can interpret such phrases to think of terrorists as martyrs to be revered for their acts.

Importantly, one of the main ways in which religion is able to disinhibit terrorism when there is a high chance, or indeed an apparent knowledge, that the terrorist will die is through the promise of the afterlife. As noted above, martyrs, in all religions, are seen as living on in heaven or ‘paradise’ after their death. Indeed, as Merari (1990) notes, religion can contribute to the perpetration of terrorism as it provides answers to such questions as what happens after death, and, in the case of suicide terrorism, when a person has permission to commit suicide. Even from a common sense point of view, it is more likely people will feel uninhibited in committing acts of terrorism that they know might or will claim their life if they are secure in the knowledge that there is life after their death, and specifically that they are going to heaven as a result of their acts rather than to hell.

While religions set out particular guides for conduct and rules of engagement in war or conflict, different interpretations of them have come about in all religions and have been used to justify many different types of violent behaviour towards others. For example, in the context of religious terrorism, many religious terrorists view their situations as an already existing state of war where they themselves, and their religion, are the victims of a great injustice or wrongdoing at the hands of some other religious group (Juergensmeyer, 2000b). Resulting from this viewpoint, joining in the war and attacking others may therefore be seen by the attacker as legitimate and even praiseworthy because such acts are framed differently - as self-defence rather than aggression; hence there is some kind of moral justification to their undertaking of violence. These concepts, especially jihad, are also often able to help disinhibit terrorism as well as other forms of violence because they teach that such violence is a “religious duty” as it is in the name of defending and promoting certain religious

‘truths’ (Robins and Post, 1997). In this way, such concepts are undoubtedly able to sanction, and thus disinhibit, acts of terror.

### *Dehumanization and Diffusion of Responsibility*

Aside from what has already been discussed in relation to religious sanctioning of violence, it is also pertinent to note that religion can play a substantial role in facilitating the process of dehumanization. Hirsch (1985) notes that Martin Luther helped to permeate through Christianity the apparent subhumanity of the Jews, as he labelled them, among other things, “thirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom” (p.45). Because religion is able to view certain situations and people in black and white terms, such as good or evil, this also helps in furthering dehumanization. Indeed, the “phenomenon of the faceless collective enemy” that religion can bring about in people’s minds “explains in large part why so many terrorist acts have targeted ordinary people” – in this way, a differentiation between combatant and non-combatant is not necessary because in the eyes of the perpetrator, the ‘enemy’ includes both types of people (Juergensmeyer, 2000b, p.174-175).

Religion may also invoke the mechanism of diffusion of responsibility as a way of lowering or surpassing inhibitions to kill. Because most religious terrorists see their acts as done in response to a divine order or something similar, this may help to overcome inhibitions because the person undertaking the violent actions can view themselves as not wholly responsible for its consequences. In this way, someone that is seen as carrying out such a divine order may even be elevated to an honourable status in society or within their religion.

### *The Psychology of Religion in the case of Palestinian Suicide Bombers*

Disinhibition through religious sanctioning in the case of Palestinian suicide bombers mostly arises from justifications based on jihad, and includes, to a degree, aspects of diffusion of responsibility. To many Palestinians volunteering for suicide attacks, jihad is ultimately perceived as a duty. For instance, one imprisoned Palestinian terrorist noted that the jihad against Israel “must go on”, while another characterized suicide attacks as “one of the more important articles of faith”, and the bombers as

“holy fighters” who have achieved the “highest level of jihad” (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.179). Hamas as an organization also teaches that jihad for Palestine and for God is a duty, and states that “nothing is loftier or deeper in nationalism than waging Jihad against the enemy and confronting him when he sets foot on the land of the Muslims. And this becomes an individual duty binding on every Muslim man and woman” ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). The farewell tape of a West Bank suicide bomber echoes this belief, as he asserts, “to you the lovers of Allah, I write with my blood. Follow the path of martyrdom. Be the best example of our Islamic nation, the martyr” (Milton-Edwards, 1996, p.167). While perceiving violence as a duty may be viewed as a motive for undertaking terrorism, it also furthers the process of disinhibition as it helps people to believe that the violence is sanctioned in the eyes of God, and thus also carries a moral justification for engaging in violence.

Diffusion of responsibility is also present to the extent that many suicide bombers believe that the decision to kill others is not theirs, but instead is God’s. The belief that “it is Allah who selects the martyrs” (Hassan, 2001) to undertake acts of suicide terrorism is quite often shown through the families whose children were suicide bombers. As one mother remarked after her sons death, “from a religious point of view we have to accept he is a martyr and thank God” (Kushner, 1996, p.335). One suicide bomber, who killed himself in an attack in the mid 1990s shortly after his friend did the same, echoes this sentiment and said to his dead friend in his will that, “when I heard the news of your martyrdom, God was telling me at that moment what to do... I am getting ready, Ali. I am preparing to meet you in heaven” (Andoni, 1997). In line with this belief, one imprisoned Palestinian terrorist commented on the matter of suicide terrorism that “those who carry out the attacks are doing Allah’s work” (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.179). Murad Tawalbi, a young man who failed in his mission as a suicide bomber, recalled that on the way to the destination of where he was supposed to blow himself and others up, “I was just thinking about saving the Palestinian people. That’s all... I never felt so calm in my life. It was the will of God” (Simon, 2003). In this way, inhibitions against violence are significantly lowered due to the fact that guilt for killing others is seen as largely unnecessary because the choice for participating in violence was almost entirely made by someone else.

Religious Palestinian suicide bombers usually, if not always, construe their actions as a way of ensuring an entrance to ‘paradise’. As one imprisoned terrorist rationalized about suicide attacks, “this is not suicide. Suicide is selfish, it is weak, it is mentally disturbed. This is *istishhad* (martyrdom or self-sacrifice in the service of Allah)” (Post, 2005b, p.63). Indeed, dying a martyr’s death is, as mentioned, one of the ways in which inhibitions against dying for a religion can be overcome. As another imprisoned Palestinian terrorist, who attempted a suicide attack, explained when asked his feelings about the fact that his own brother had recruited him for the mission, “he wasn’t trying to make me wear an explosive belt. He was giving me a ticket to heaven” (Simon, 2003). Another Palestinian in a similar situation described his viewpoint in a related way, stating that “by pressing the detonator, you can immediately open the door to Paradise – it is the shortest path to heaven” (Hassan, 2001).

In addition, religious leaders encourage and promote this way of thinking continually in many sermons in their mosques (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003; Simon, 2003). Hamas itself explains that martyrdom is lawful, and even admirable, as it is done out of “love for Allah and a desire to please Allah: to do what Allah has commanded, which in the specific instance of martyrdom operations is confronting and attacking the enemies of Islam, even if this means one’s own death” ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). Furthermore, Merari (2005) notes that when group leaders prepare a suicide bomber for their mission, they concentrate on justifying the act by recounting to the would-be bomber about how acts of ‘self-sacrifice’ are “Allah’s will” as well as reinforcing the rewards in paradise to be gained from it (p.79). Intention also appears to be important in discussing whether suicide attacks are justifiable, as suicide alone is forbidden in Islam. Hence, these attacks are framed as “the highest sacrifice” for Allah, where the intentions of the bomber – the “*mujahid*” – are “pure, unselfish, and Muslim” (ibid). Indeed, Sheik Yassin commented on suicide attacks that “in Islam, it is always a question of intention”, and claimed that suicide bombers do not intend to kill civilians; however, when this did happen the bomber does not have to feel guilt because killing them is not his or her overall intention (Davis, 2003, p.109).

*The Psychology of Religion in the case of the IRA*

While on the surface it may appear that religion does not play that great a role in the justification of IRA terrorism, mostly because the Catholic hierarchy as a whole does not support the IRA's violence, it is obvious that Catholicism and its teachings have had, and continue to have, a major influence on the organization. For instance, the IRA leadership has consistently argued that their violence is justified on the grounds that it is a 'just war', both in the religious and non-religious senses (Moxon-Browne, 1993, p.154). From a religious point of view, the IRA believes that its members are entitled to undertake violence because the criteria to frame violence as a just war has been met by the situation in their country since it was partitioned. Firstly, "the minority Catholic population in Northern Ireland has been consistently denied basic rights by the Northern Ireland and British states"; and secondly, they regard the Protestant "forces of law and order" in the North as not ever sufficiently protecting the Catholic minority from "Unionists" (Bairner, 1986, p.638). Hence, the IRA as an organization view their violence as a war of defence. This viewpoint is further bolstered by the Catholic Church, who also plead for justice for the Catholic minority in that area (ibid, p.639). Indeed, even though the Church as such does not support IRA violence, it often aids in legitimating their actions, as church leaders often voice explanations as to why the IRA exists as well as also tending to publicly stress how badly Catholics have been treated in Northern Ireland by other groups (ibid, p.639).

Catholicism within the IRA itself is such that practically all members, especially IRA leaders, profess their devotion to maintaining a Catholic way of life. Ex-member Maria McGuire, although perhaps the exception in this instance, notes in her autobiography of her time in the organization that IRA leaders "realized the strength of Catholic feeling in the movement" and told her to keep it very quiet that she herself was not a practicing Catholic as it would have "upset too many traditional Republican supporters" (1973, p.71). She also mentions that one of the major leaders at the time "believed he had direct contact with God", and states that he was not the only one to hold this belief (ibid, p.71-72). Former IRA commander Sean MacStiofain also notes in his memoirs that religion was a significant part of his life. During his time in prison, for example, he writes that "we were also sustained by our belief in God and



in the practice of our religion, which I have always found to be a great consolation any time I have been in a tight spot” (MacStiofain, 1975, p.62).

Indeed, the entire basis for the IRA’s existence is very much tied in with religious overtones. The declaration of the Irish Republic that followed the Easter Rising in April of 1916 begins with the phrase “in the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood” (Kinsella, 1994, p.25). In this way, those who took part in the Rising “saw themselves as fighting in a holy cause that was sanctified by God” (ibid). Thus, the IRA sees themselves as merely carrying this process on, and thus feel that their actions, though far more violent than the Rising, are also ‘sanctified by God’. The importance of Catholicism in the IRA can also be seen in the months preceding the split of the organization, when the then-leader Cathal Goulding issued a memorandum to IRA battalion commanders asking them to discontinue the tradition of “the saying of a decade of the rosary” at IRA funerals (O’Brien, 1994, p.158). This was largely denounced by the majority of commanders, and even the Church disagreed with this request. Instead, members of the Church as well as local politicians and those disgruntled members of the IRA funded a new movement – the Provisional IRA, later to be known just as the IRA. This new “breakaway movement” was seen as “good Catholic nationalism”, unlike Goulding’s IRA (ibid, p.158).

Adding to the religious dimension in the IRA’s justification of violence is that individual members within the church’s leadership have come out in support of the organization and its actions at different stages, thereby further serving to help religiously sanction, and perhaps even give moral justification to, their violence. Indeed, it is now well-known that in 1972 a local priest had a significant role in the IRA bombing of the village of Claudy, which killed nine and injured many more (McTernan, 2003, p.29). Other priests have come out in support of the IRA by attaching Christianity’s just war theory as a justification for the group’s terrorism (ibid, p.88). Adding to this, Father Denis Faul has said in the past that Catholicism offers members of the IRA the capability to both kill and be killed, as death is viewed from a sacrificial point of view and the added chance of forgiveness “lessens the guilt involved in killing” (Juergensmeyer, 2000b, p.41). Indeed, this concept of forgiveness itself is able to heighten the process of disinhibition because it allows people to

believe that they are permitted to do just about anything if they ask forgiveness for it later on. In this way, a belief that forgiveness can be granted for almost anything clearly fuels the disinhibition process within a potential perpetrator of terrorism because there will exist a lack of fear about the consequences of undertaking violence as well as a lessening of feelings of guilt.

It is because of this profound sense of religiosity that martyrdom has been sanctioned, and to a high degree even revered, in Irish political culture, and accordingly in the IRA. Indeed, “for republicans, dying for Ireland is a sacrificial act akin to those religious acts of Christian witness” (Toolis, 1995, p.339). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Irish historical cultural myths have extolled the value of martyrdom since the 1916 Easter Rising. This ideology of martyrdom and sacrifice fused with Catholicism can be noted in funerals for IRA Volunteers. For instance, the funerals of the 1982 hunger strikers prominently featured crucifixes and rosary-beads along with the Irish flag (O’Brien, 1994, p.171). Indeed, martyrs such as the ones who died as hunger strikers are revered within the IRA as almost divine-like, and are seen as “heirs to the Irish Catholic martyrs of old” (ibid, p.167).

## **Conclusion:**

Over approximately the last 20 to 30 years the apparent outbreak of religious terrorism has seen some horrific acts of violence take place in a variety of different countries. Ranging from small and large scale suicide attacks to bombing and shooting campaigns as well as assassination attempts, the rise of religious terrorism has shown just how brutal and destructive violence in the name of religion can be (Lincoln, 2003). While religion is, at best, only a part of the picture for understanding terrorism as it also has enormous potential for inhibiting such behaviour, this chapter has sought to demonstrate the ways in which religion can facilitate disinhibited violent behaviour, and has done so by examining crucial factors such as the ability of religion to encourage and maintain a strong sense of loyalty to the values the faith stands for, how the interpretations of certain religious doctrines

can work toward inciting violence, and how certain ways of thinking can promote demonization and dehumanization. It has also been pointed out that the sanctioning of religious teachings occurs within many cultures, in some societies to a very high degree, and that this can serve to further entrench religious sanctioning of violence in many cases. The application of the two illustrative cases in this chapter – the IRA and Palestinian suicide bombers – have additionally provided contemporary examples for the arguments that have been put forth and examined, and have helped to show just how prevalent religious sanctioning of violence can be among terrorist groups. Having examined aspects of culture, religion, hatred and empathy in relation to disinhibition and terrorism, the next chapter turns its attentions to the psychology of the group in order to work toward a comprehensive understanding of the role disinhibition plays in terrorism.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **THE TERRORIST GROUP: DYNAMICS AND PROCESSES**

Similar to belonging to a culture, being a part of a terrorist group both offers and provides a sense of meaning and identity for its members. Group membership consequently allows people to feel a part of something important and often leads to a strong sense of identification with, and loyalty to, other group members and the ideology to which the group adheres. Once a person has joined a terrorist group or organization, inhibitions against violence are gradually lessened due to the processes and dynamics that tend to occur whenever such groups are formed. This chapter therefore seeks to demonstrate and explain what these processes and dynamics are, and how they are able to lower inhibitions against undertaking terrorist actions. Indeed, while the fourth chapter of this thesis discussed societal culture and its effects on an individual, this chapter focuses on organizational culture and its ability to affect inhibitions against violence. Amongst others, ingroup versus outgroup psychological processes are discussed, as well as an evaluation of groupthink in relation to terrorist groups. Obedience to authority is also analysed in substantial depth, so that an understanding of the relationship between a leader and group members is better understood in the context of terrorism and terrorist behaviour. Disinhibiting mechanisms such as diffusion of responsibility and displacement of responsibility for violent actions are also considered in this chapter due to their significance in a group

situation. Again, case illustrations from the IRA and Palestinian suicide bombers are highlighted to provide further evidence of the theoretical material.

## **Group Dynamics:**

### *Group Cohesiveness*

The effect of a group upon an individual is such that many terrorist organizations are able to foster an intense level of group cohesion that results in a situation where an individual comes to view other group members as “a family for whom they are as willing to die as a mother for her child or a soldier for his buddies” (Atran, 2003b). Such group cohesiveness frequently develops in response to fulfilling certain psychological needs. Often, this is a need related to feeling a sense of belonging or the need to respond to a perceived “shared danger” (Post, 1987).

While group cohesiveness is essential for the functioning of any kind of organization, in terrorist organizations this cohesiveness often helps to disinhibit aggressive and violent behaviour because it tends to allow somewhat of a “group mind” (Post, 1990) or collective identity to be cultivated (Beck, 1999, p.145). In the case of Palestinian suicide bombers, it has been argued that the group dynamics are such that once the group member “accepts their role as martyr, they have taken on the identity of the organization” and are “no longer psychologically separate” individuals but instead have “fused” their identity with the goals and attitudes of those of the organization (Valenty, 2004). Indeed, Post, Sprinzak and Denny (2003) noted from their interviews with imprisoned Palestinian terrorists that it was clear that many individuals came to define their identity as that of a group member above individual considerations, and identified the goals and ideologies of the organization as their own personal aims. For example, one imprisoned man remarked that “armed attacks are an integral part of the organization’s struggle... Our goals can only be achieved through force” (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003, p.179).

In addition, McCauley and Segal (1987) note that in the context of terrorist groups, such cohesiveness permits a feeling of “reinforcement of the individual’s sense of mission and self-righteousness” (p.239), which in turn helps to create the kind of ‘us versus them’ thinking that was outlined in chapter three. In addition, what often results from this kind of group cohesiveness is that aggressive behaviour towards outsiders of the group grows to be “more extreme over time” (ibid, p.247).

Interestingly, group cohesiveness can also be “intensified” depending on the extent to which there exists a sense of honour in being chosen to belong to a terrorist group and how successful the group is perceived to be (Valenty, 2004, p.14). As well as this, the smaller the group, the easier it is for group cohesiveness to be prevalent to a higher degree (ibid). In the case of Hamas, where terrorist cells are composed of approximately seven members with one leader (Battersby, 1995), group cohesiveness can thus be expected to be seen at a very high level. Group cohesiveness is further bolstered when the group comes into contact with other ones, especially if such meetings are in an adversarial manner, because this is able to “accentuate the positive bias” a person has toward their own group while reinforcing the negative view of the other group (Beck, 1999, p.144-145).

This perception of ingroup versus outgroup is one of the main ways in which inhibitions against violence can be surpassed. This is because it allows for stereotypes and categorization of individuals to occur, which in turn paves the way for displaying a marked lack of empathy towards those members of particular outgroups. Indeed, as Beck (1999) writes, “as soon as boundaries are drawn around an outgroup on the basis of religion, race, or creed, its individual members are perceived as interchangeable... This kind of ingroup-outgroup division provides the matrix for biased thinking and prejudice” (p.151). Aggression and violence against those not part of the defined ingroup can be encouraged by belonging to a group for a few important reasons. Firstly, psychological blocks against violent behaviour can be passed over depending on the extent to which the ingroup believes they hold moral superiority over other groups (Brewer, 1999, p.435). The ‘us versus them’ thinking that is prevalent here leads people to view themselves as more virtuous and principled than members of other groups – hence, this attitude “provides justification or legitimization for domination or active subjugation of outgroups” (ibid). While it was

mentioned previously that the belief of a threat to a group makes that group more cohesive, this perception of a threat to “ingroup interests or survival” from outgroups can also allow people to behave aggressively toward outgroups (Brewer, 1999, p.435-436). Violent behaviour may therefore be sanctioned by the group as a whole in response to such a threat or perceived danger. Indeed, this kind of situation “creates a circumstance in which identification and interdependence with the ingroup is directly associated with fear and hostility toward the threatening outgroup” (ibid, p.436).

As has been shown in previous chapters, the degree to which a group feels cohesive and the extent to which a group mind develops may also help in fostering the process of dehumanization. As mentioned above, a considerable level of group cohesion encourages a lack of empathy toward members of outgroups, which in turn can also eventually endorse viewing others in a dehumanized manner. For instance, Struch and Schwartz (1989) argue that once there is a motive for “intergroup aggression” by a cohesive group, inhibitions to undertake violence can be lessened once people justify their violence by dehumanizing their opponent. They posit that “the stronger the conflict and hence the motivation to harm, the more the dehumanization”, and once an ingroup starts to dehumanize an outgroup, “the greater the aggression” the ingroup inflicts on its adversaries (ibid).

Group cohesiveness in the IRA is directly encouraged by the organization’s leadership. The Green Book, for example, notes that one of the important ways in which to achieve the group’s aims and objectives of a free and united Ireland is to “build on a spirit of comradeship” between the IRA’s members (Dillon, 1994, p.266). Later on in the Green Book, it is also noted that if this “comradeship” between members “is lacking”, this can help in destroying both popular support for the organization and the general efficient functioning of it (ibid, p.279). Within Hamas, too, group cohesiveness is encouraged as necessary for ‘victory’. For instance, the Hamas covenant states that in order to “counter” the Jewish ‘enemy’, “the enemy should be faced by the people as a single body, which if one member should complain, the rest of the body would respond by feeling the same pains” ([www.hamasonline.com](http://www.hamasonline.com), 2004). The organization goes on to say that once such a “spirit” exists within the group, “brotherliness would deepen, cooperation, sympathy

and unity will be enhanced and the ranks will be solidified to confront the enemies” (ibid).

### *Groupthink*

In addition to the above arguments, one of the main ways in which group cohesiveness is able to disinhibit behaviour is through its ability to encourage and praise conformity of ideas in group situations. In this way, it is theorized that terrorist groups have the propensity for individual members to “submerge” their identity with that of the group (Post, 1987, p.309). This process of gradual conformity within a group often leads to what is termed “groupthink” (Janis, 1972). Essentially, groupthink tends to occur when there is a situation of a “highly cohesive” group “coupled with directive leadership” (Chen et al, 1996).

In terrorist organizations, groupthink appears to be demonstrated to an “extreme degree” (Post, 1990, p.36). Post (1990) suggests that this is because a terrorist group by its very nature has to perpetrate acts of terrorism so that it can “justify its existence” (p.36). Hence, any dissent in achieving this will necessarily be quashed because conforming to this aim is paramount. Although Irving Janis conceived of the concept of groupthink in relation to governmental political decisions; it has, as noted, become an element in understanding processes within terrorist groups also. Janis effectively argued that groupthink occurs when “member’s strivings for unanimity” take priority over realistic and rational decision making (1972, p.9). In essence, “groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement” (ibid). Symptoms of groupthink, especially in the case of terrorism, include the following: a belief that the group is invulnerable, which leads to “excessive optimism and excessive risk taking”; the assumption that the group is of high moral character; a “one-dimensional” view of the enemy as “evil”; and a lack of tolerance for those members that attempt to question the “shared key beliefs” that form the core of the groups ideology (Post, 1990).

Groupthink is therefore able to lower or remove inhibitions to kill because it permits those undertaking violence to “minimize decision conflicts between ethical values and expediency” (Janis, 1972, p.204). As well as this, the assumption that one’s own



group is of high moral character also helps in evading any feelings of guilt or embarrassment for having undertaken violence (ibid). Because group cohesiveness often leads to a lack of empathy for victims of their violence or the dehumanization of such victims, groupthink further aids this process as it helps confirm negative stereotypes and categorizations of opponents (ibid).

In Palestinian groups Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad, examples of groupthink can be found from the soon-to-be bomber's preparatory stages in the organization up until the day he or she actually commits the suicide attack. For instance, in the week leading up to the attack, a couple of "assistants", higher up in the organization, remain with the would-be attacker twenty-four hours a day (Hassan, 2001). These assistants monitor and maintain the person's sense of confidence and willingness about their impending attack and subsequent death, and if they perceive any "signs of doubt" from him or her, someone even more senior in the organization joins the assistants in order to influence the would-be attacker to proceed in carrying out their actions (Valenty, 2004). It is also worth noting that a lot of members of such groups seem to display groupthink in the way that many believe and argue publicly that if the group to which they belong says that a certain action is "required and justified, then it is required and justified" (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003).

### *Diffusion of Responsibility*

The group and collective decision making are also important to disinhibition as they are often a precursor to utilizing diffusion of responsibility as a mechanism for disinhibiting violent behaviour. As Baumeister (1999) writes, "the larger the group, the less responsible any individual person feels... No one feels the pressure to say that a certain action is wrong. Indeed, the very fact that 'everyone else is doing it'... seems to indicate that it is correct, or at least acceptable" (p.299). Diffusion of responsibility is therefore a powerful disinhibitor of violent behaviour because it allows those in a group to feel a distinct lack of accountability for any actions they undertake against others. Interestingly, Bandura (1990) notes that many organizations will go to immense trouble to formulate "sophisticated mechanisms" that eclipse or conceal individual responsibility for any decisions that result in harm to others (p.176).

The idea of diffusion of responsibility apparently first came about during the mid 1960s after the murder of Kitty Genovese in New York City in 1964. The woman was brutally raped and murdered while approximately thirty-eight people either saw or heard what was happening but did nothing until after her murder (Waller, 2002). Two researchers theorized from this that those who did see or hear what was happening to Kitty probably decided that someone else will call, or already had called, the emergency services or helped in some other way (ibid, p.213). After experiments with this hypothesis in mind, it was found that “lone bystanders would often come forward to help a victim, whereas bystanders who believed they were part of a large group would not” (ibid). In a terrorist organization, where its collective ethos is inextricably linked to justifying the killing of people, there is no pressure to feel guilt about such killings due to the fact that there are so many others involved, from the planning stages right through to the execution of the actions themselves (Waller, 2002, p.213).

An example of diffusion of responsibility can be seen in one of the members of the IRA who was on trial for his part in a bombing in Coventry, England, in the late 1930s. When talking about his views on violence toward others, he stated that, “I am a soldier of the IRA. My job was to store explosives until they were needed by men who would call on me and ask for them. I did not know... [the other IRA members involved] intended to place the bomb in the centre of Coventry in the daytime” (Dillon, 1994, p.34). Thus, the person feels absolved of blame for the bombing as he believed that his role was of little consequence due to him being part of a larger overall group. In the case of Palestinian suicide bombers, diffusion of responsibility is most clearly seen in the religious examples provided in the previous chapter, where those in the organization (both members in authority positions and those who are not) attribute responsibility for suicide bombings to God – where the bombers are chosen by God and are carrying out divine obligations, hence they cannot be blamed when people are killed as a result.

## **Deindividuation:**

Being part of a group, especially one where an ingroup-outgroup distinction is emphasized, additionally helps in creating the conditions for deindividuated behaviour to occur. The concept of deindividuation as a social psychological phenomenon is a relatively new idea, having only been developed in the mid twentieth century (Waller, 2002). This term is applied to the process by which people lose consciousness of themselves as individuals when they are part of a defined group or sometimes even just part of some kind of crowd (ibid, p.216). In essence, deindividuation theory claims that “under conditions where the member is not individuated in the group, there is likely to occur for the member a reduction of inner constraints against doing certain things” (Festinger et al., 1952, p.382; cited in Postmes and Spears, 1998, p.239). This reduction of inner constraints also applies to aggressive or violent behaviours.

Deindividuation is primarily able to disinhibit behaviour because it confers anonymity to a person. Following from this, a person may become less aware of himself or herself as an individual actor, and thus less able to regulate and evaluate their behaviour. Anonymity as part of deindividuation has been shown in previous research to have a considerable effect on disinhibiting behaviour. Diener (1976) argues that anonymity is an important variable because it instigates conditions that allow people to stop perceiving themselves and others as individuals, which therefore leads to deindividuated behaviour – “it has been found that anonymity may release such diverse uninhibited behaviours as stealing, aggression, and physical intimacy” (p.498).

Numerous experiments have been undertaken to better understand the phenomenon of deindividuation, most notably those of Zimbardo (1970) and Diener (1976).

Zimbardo’s 1970 experiment used university students as its subjects and created certain conditions to test the effects of deindividuation and disinhibition: the identities of the students were obscured within a small group setting, with numbers substituted in place of their names; they were told to wear loose-fitting laboratory coats over top

of their clothes; and on top of this their faces were concealed by masks or hoods (Zimbardo, 2000). Once these conditions were created, they were then asked to shock other participants who were told they were taking part in a similar study on stress – results showed that those experimented upon in the above described deindividuated conditions “delivered twice as much shock” as those tested in control conditions (ibid, p.18). Interestingly, Diener’s 1976 experiments, in which anonymity and aggression were tested both in and out of a group situation as well as with a degree of altered responsibility, showed that anonymity fostered a “lessened concern for social evaluation”, however it “produced only a nonsignificant trend in aggression” (p.503). Nonetheless, some of those who participated said that they “felt more anonymous” and unidentifiable while undertaking aggressive actions, and because of this, felt “less concern over what others would think of their behaviour” (ibid, p.505). Thus, these experiments essentially demonstrated that uninhibited behaviour can emerge when such variables as anonymity and a sense of altered responsibility exist (Diener, 1977, p.144).

From what has already been discussed, it is clear that anonymity is able to further deindividuation and thus disinhibited behaviour because it permits a person to be less aware of their individual actions, or perhaps more aware of themselves as a group member instead of an individual. A diminished sense of self-awareness is theorized to bring about a minimization of self-regulation in people because the individuals involved are not as aware of “behaviour-norm discrepancies” (Diener, 1979, p.1169). As a consequence, and as Waller (2002) argues in the case of terrorism, “a loss of self-awareness may lead to a breakdown of such internalized controls as shame, guilt, or fear and result in increased levels of aggression” (p.217).

Despite the reality that there is an abundance of theoretical material and sound evidence for deindividuation and its importance to releasing inhibitions, the concept has been criticized on a number of occasions. For instance, there is a debate over whether deindividuation is the cause of uninhibited behaviour, or if it is perhaps more correct to say that deindividuation is instead a result of such behaviour, as discussed in chapter two. This argument is theorized on the premise that those within a group “feel more similar as they perform unrestrained acts together” and as such then “become deindividuated as perceived similarity between group members increases,

that is, as they simultaneously perform the same activities” (Diener, 1977, p.145). In addition to this point, the other major criticism levelled against deindividuation theory is that variables such as anonymity do not have that great an effect on disinhibiting aggressive behaviour. For example, Postmes and Spears (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of past and present deindividuation research and found that, overall, there was not “strong support” that any of the variables discussed earlier overtly resulted in aggression or violence (p.250). In fact, they concluded that the conditions that produce deindividuation lead to “an increase in normative behaviour or, more specifically, to behaviour that is normative within the social context” (ibid, p.252). Interestingly, this finding can be directly applied to terrorism, as the normative behaviour in terrorist organizations is indeed that of violence against other human beings. In this way, deindividuation is important to terrorist groups as it essentially releases inhibitions to doing what the group does.

Although there are not a lot of deindividuation examples to be found in the terrorist groups studied in this thesis, there are nonetheless a few that are of note. For example, in some Irish communities, IRA volunteers are sometimes seen in public wearing their “black face-masks, berets and uniforms” (Apter, 1990, p.168), which may give rise to deindividuation through the effects of their perceived anonymity. Heskin (1980) also contends that for a newcomer to the IRA, “not only will the new recruit have entered a formal structure, he will also have entered a role which will make specific demands on his attitudes and behaviour. The role is one of ‘guerrilla’, ‘freedom fighter’, ‘revolutionary’, or the role favoured and promoted by the Republican movement, ‘soldier-politician’” (p.92). Being in this ‘role’ within the group may help to give rise to deindividuated behaviour because of the way in which the group member is made to feel less like an individual and more like an anonymous part of something much larger. As well as this, some of those involved in IRA bombing operations have been disguised to blend into where the operation was taking place (Silke, 2003a, p.50), which can also be argued to have provided the opportunity for deindividuation to occur due to the perception of anonymity that may have resulted from this.

Examples of deindividuation in the case of Palestinian suicide bombers can mostly be found in the processes that prepare the bomber to undertake their attack. In some of

the training sessions for would-be terrorists, “the men were dressed in camouflage uniforms and some had their faces covered in black masks, some in green masks” (Davis, 2003, p.151). As well as this, recruits at times marched in uniformity and were “draped in white capes and white masks that revealed only their eyes and mouths. Each mask was adorned with green (the colour of Islam) headbands” (ibid, p.151). Elements of deindividuation can also be seen at the time of the attack, as the suicide attacker will “often be disguised as a religious Jew, an Israeli soldier, or a tourist” (Moghadam, 2003, p.86), which may have lead to the attacker perceiving themselves as completely anonymous.

As a whole, deindividuation theory has been able to offer further insights into how inhibitions against violence are released. In spite of the criticisms discussed above, research on this subject has been able to show that there is at least an “increased tendency toward aggressive behaviour” when deindividuating conditions are present (Waller, 2002, p.216). Deindividuation is effectively able to encourage disinhibited behaviour because, as with dehumanization, it can provide a substantial degree of psychological distance between a potential perpetrator of violence and their victim(s) because of the effect that anonymity, and thus lowered self-awareness, can have on a person’s behaviour.

### **Obedience to Authority:**

One of the most central ways in which inhibitions to kill are overcome in a group situation is if a known authority sanctions the violent behaviour. According to Zimbardo (1999), research on obedience to authority and violent behaviour has found that there are certain conditions under which an authority can help to disinhibit such behaviours. For example, an authority can be crucial in legitimating a groups’ ideology. Additionally, since authorities usually set rules in regards to a group member’s conduct, they can also set “rules that channel behavioural options”, and, importantly, are able to displace responsibility for particular actions onto either themselves or someone else. Indeed, as Stahelski (2004) notes, the process of

lowering inhibitions to kill through conditioning within terrorist groups “centres on and builds from the power of the charismatic leader”.

### *Authorities in Group Situations*

One notable way in which authorities in terrorist organizations can help to gradually release inhibitions against violent behaviour in group members is to slowly increase their members' tasks within the organization. In other words, upon entering the organization, a person may at first be delegated “peripheral activities” that are non-violent in nature, but will progressively be given tasks noticeably more violent in nature (McCauley and Segal, 1987). Labelled the “foot in the door phenomenon”, or a process of escalating commitments, this kind of socialization process within the group is essentially based on the premise that once a person has consented to undertake a seemingly minor task, they are more likely to then obey increasingly larger demands as time goes on (Waller, 2002, p.205). This is able to aid in the releasing of inhibitions because the journey to violence is a gradual one that is theorized to therefore “make later evil-doing easier” (ibid). This is because such a situation brings about a new psychological environment: “once one has taken the initial step, one is in a new psychological and social context” that is more conducive to following larger and increasingly more difficult orders (ibid). Within Hamas, this process can be seen in the way that new recruits are at first taught about religion and politics, and later gradually this teaching turns to lectures extolling the virtue of martyrdom (Bartholet, 1995). In addition, new recruits to the organizations are given progressively more important tasks to do for the organization, usually to do with the delivery of weapons or information from one site to another, in order to “test their commitment” to the group as well as to gauge their obedience to authority (Moghadam, 2003; Kushner, 1996).

Following the orders of an authority can also be said to help release inhibitions to kill or harm others because of the structure that a situation of authority creates. According to Kelman (1973), such a structure allows for a different kind of moral code to be set in place, where normal moral principles are cast aside. This, in turn, makes it possible for justifications for violence to be accepted more readily – “when acts of violence are explicitly ordered, implicitly encouraged, tacitly approved, or at least permitted by

legitimate authorities, people's readiness to commit or condone them is considerably enhanced. The fact that such acts are authorized seems to carry automatic justification for them" (Kelman, 1973, p.39). Indeed, when acts of violence are seemingly condoned or approved by a leader, this is able to break down inhibitions against violence because the sanctioning of such behaviour is able to afford "security and justification" to those who carry out the acts of terrorism (Keane, 2001; cited in Borum, 2004). In the case of religious terrorism especially, the group's leader is "seen as the authentic interpreter of God's word", which not only helps in removing any hesitation about killing but also aids in "endowing the destruction of the defined enemy with sacred significance" (Post, 2005b, p.58).

Additionally, disinhibition through authorization is significant because it in turn helps to produce and maintain a sense of 'routinization'. In a situation of routinization, group members become "involved in an action without considering the implications of that action, and without really making a decision" (Kelman, 1973, p.46). As people "become habituated" to their specific tasks, they proceed to view it as an ordinary job, which then results in the "nature of the task" becoming "completely disassociated from their performance of it" (ibid, p.47).

### *The Duty to Obey and the Milgrim Obedience Experiments*

One of the main ways in which group leaders and organizational authorities are able to elicit violent behaviour from other group members is through encouraging loyalty and cultivating a sense of duty to obey orders, whatever they may be. This is especially amenable in societies that socialize obedience to authority as a common value. Even in cultures that do not promote authoritarianism to any substantial degree, any kind of group situation can lead to the valuing of authority. As Kelman writes, "an individual in an authority situation characteristically feels obligated to obey the orders of the authorities... The basic structure of a situation of legitimate authority requires the individual to respond in terms of authoritative demands rather than personal preferences" (1973, p.39). Situations of authority generate this sense of obligation to follow the desires of a leader – without this feeling of duty it becomes problematic to "maintain a dependable and equitable social order" (Kelman and Hamilton, 1989, p.20). The belief in the duty to obey is therefore able to help lower



inhibitions against violence because it brings about a different perspective in which guilt for not undertaking violence becomes the norm rather than the other way around. In other words, inhibitions are lowered because violence is framed as a duty that has to be fulfilled, rather than the violence being seen as something that is immoral. A sense of duty, then, may be one of the most important avenues for obeying superior orders without question in a terrorist group.

This aspect of group processes, along with other obedience factors, is seen nowhere more clearly than in Stanley Milgrim's obedience experiments. These experiments, as described in chapter two of this thesis, tested the conditions under which authority would and would not be obeyed, and had surprising results. The first experiment, in which the 'teacher' (subject) and the 'student' (the learner) could not see or hear each other, found that 65 percent of the teachers complied with the experimenters demands of shocking right up to the highest available level of voltage (Milgrim, 1974, p.32). Interestingly, the fifth experiment had the same percentage for shocking the student as the first. However, this experiment had differing conditions – unlike the first one, the teacher could see and hear the student, had physical contact with the student, and was made aware of a heart condition that the student had (Milgrim, 1974).

To test convincingly whether obedience to authority was the main factor behind such high-voltage shocks, the seventh experiment tested the teacher when the authority was not present, and the eleventh tested what would happen if the teacher was to choose the level of shock to administer. Interestingly, only nine teachers (out of forty) chose to shock to the highest level when there was no authority present, while only one chose to shock to the highest level when the teacher was able to choose his or her shock level for the student (Milgrim, 1974, p.60-61).

The belief in a duty to obey an authority is clearly apparent in these experiments. As Milgrim noted, "the ordinary person who shocked the victim did so out of a sense of obligation – a conception of his duties as a subject – and not from any peculiarly aggressive tendencies" (1974, p.6). Indeed, it appears as if a person does not lose their morality in an authority situation, but that the morality "acquires a radically different focus" (ibid, p.8). The morality now lies with the extent to which the person believes they are keeping up with the expectations that the leader or person in authority has

laid down for him or her to follow – for instance, in a military situation, a soldier may not experience feelings of guilt for the consequences of the missions they undertake, yet will “feel pride or shame depending on how well he has performed the mission assigned to him” (ibid, p.8). This can also be seen in terrorist groups, as obeying a leader and completing the set mission are of paramount importance. An obligation to obey those in authority can also be seen even in those who disobeyed Milgrim’s orders to shock the other participants. For example, Zimbardo (1999) questioned Milgrim on how the ‘teacher’ reacted in the experiment that tested what happened once the teacher learned that the ‘student’ apparently had a heart condition. When this student seemed to have a heart attack, Milgrim noted that none of the teachers got up to help the victim at this point, and those that did waited until the experimenter granted them permission to do so (Zimbardo, 1999).

In applying this theory specifically to terrorism, the findings of the Milgrim experiments, especially on the duty to obey an authority, show that such behaviour – framing acts of terrorism as a duty to obey superior orders – is also bound to occur within terrorist organizations. For instance, one imprisoned Palestinian terrorist spoke of how there did indeed exist a feeling of duty to obey all of the orders, without question, given by superior officers in the organization by those lower in the hierarchy (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003). In the case of the IRA, Heskin (1980) has pointed out that recruits believe it is their duty to obey all orders in relation to violence because of their perceived role in the organization – as part of this, group members “will have technical and practical aspects of [their] activities on which to focus on and so diminish [their] moral concern” over undertaking such violent actions.

### *Authority and Displacement of Responsibility*

Aside from justifying violence as a duty to obey superior orders, an authority situation can also help to further the disinhibition process by allowing those obeying orders to attribute responsibility for their actions onto their leader or someone else of influence. In this way, if a person participating in harmful acts against others can displace responsibility for their actions and their action’s consequences, inhibitions against acting violently or aggressively will be significantly lowered. Indeed,

irrespective of the context and despite individual personality differences, “the basic structure” of any authority situation is such that “the individual does not see himself as personally responsible for the consequences of his action... Thus when his action causes harm to others, he can feel relatively free of guilt” (Kelman, 1973, p.39). This mechanism therefore works in the same way as diffusion of responsibility.

For instance, one conclusion from Milgrim’s experiments was that a subordinate in an authority situation comes to see his or her self as merely an “instrument for carrying out another person’s wishes” or an “agent of external authority” rather than an autonomous person responsible for their own actions (1974, p.xii and p.8). One of Milgrim’s experiments in particular highlights how authority and a loss of personal responsibility are intertwined. In this experiment, a different role was introduced for the teacher – while another person was brought in to actually press the button to shock the student, the teacher’s new role consisted of undertaking “subsidiary acts” that would help along the process yet “remove him from the actual act of depressing the lever on the shock generator” (ibid, p.121-122). As such, the person perceives themselves to be more legitimately absolved of blame and feelings of guilt over the action because not only has someone authorized violent actions to take place, they themselves are not the ones who have physically perpetrated such violence (ibid, p.122).

Displacing responsibility for one’s own role in the perpetration of violence is therefore a powerful mechanism for disinhibiting aggressive behaviour in terrorist groups or otherwise because of its inherent ability to dismiss any “self-prohibiting” thoughts a person has against committing violence due to the strong belief that there actions are not their own (Bandura, 1990). Adding to this, the use of authority to warrant the belief of a lack of personal responsibility is also important in that it additionally provides the conditions for those participating in group violence to feel less responsibility as well as a lesser “social concern” for the welfare of those “mistreated” by other groups of people (ibid, p.173).

Authoritarianism and obedience to authority in the IRA’s case is quite possibly the most noticeable aspect in their functioning as an organization. Before 1977, the structure of the IRA emulated that of a formal and hierarchical military organization,

and included large units and battalions (Wilkinson, 1982, p.146). After 1977, however, the group reorganized these units into smaller “cells”, headed by one person, which aimed to create a more secretive organization than before (ibid, p.146-147). These in turn come under the jurisdiction of the Army Council and the IRA’s General Headquarters, who are also responsible for deciding effectively all of the IRA’s military and political policy (ibid).

This seemingly authoritarian structure of the IRA has been noted to be evident throughout its membership, and has clearly played a role in helping to lower inhibitions against terrorism. For example, Heskin (1980) notes that there is a “common and pervasive” degree of authoritarianism amongst IRA group members, and also points out that the regulations concerning behaviour and even seemingly insignificant actions by members are watched over by the organization’s leadership to a considerable degree. Indeed, it is even specified in the Green Book that, for instance, “Volunteers are forbidden to undertake hunger-strikes without the express sanction of General Headquarters” (Dillon, 1994, p.272). In addition, the Green Book also stipulates that one of the conditions for joining the organization is that the member must “obey all orders and regulations issued... by the Army Authority and by... [any] superior officer” (ibid, p.266).

The Army Council itself conducts its meetings in an “extremely stiff and formalised” manner, where “military discipline is the norm, Christian names are banned and members are addressed by their full paramilitary titles despite long acquaintance and close friendship within the group” (Heskin, 1980, p.92). As a result of such practices, those new to the organization “enter a formalised structure in which orders are given, obedience demanded and disobedience punished harshly” (ibid). In this way, such obedience training helps the disinhibition process as it conditions certain responses and thus lowers inhibitions because following the orders of an authority, no matter how injurious or harmful, is seen as the appropriate and justified course of action. In addition, displacement of responsibility provides an added level of disinhibition, as there are less fears about the consequences of acting injuriously toward others because it is perceived that an authority is able take ultimate blame for it.

Differing only slightly to the IRA, Palestinian suicide terror groups also display a similar mindset when it comes to obeying an authority. Authoritarianism is displayed to such a high degree in Palestinian terror groups because of its prevalence in Palestinian society in general (Burdman, 2003). Thus, those who are members of such groups will ultimately be “comfortable with dogmatic, unequivocal opinions” and sustain “an incapacity to deal with choices” (ibid, p.109). The setup in such organizations for suicide attacks is apparently one that is divided into several different levels – at the top is the organizational leadership who are responsible for deciding the need for suicide attacks as well as all other decisions important to this process; and the next tier down consists of the person who is charged with recruiting the potential bomber and his or her aides. This person is also responsible for assembling the explosives and the detonator. In turn, the aides selected are the ones who source the explosives and arrange for transportation for the bomber to their target (Moghadam, 2003, p.85). Below this is the “martyrdom cell” (ibid), as described earlier, in which the bomber builds a close relationship with his trainers (the aforementioned aides) and with whose support he or she eventually carries out the attack. Even upon formally entering the organization, the potential bomber reaches the stage within the organization in which “obedience to a leader is now demanded and if not forthcoming will be coerced” (Burdman, 2003).

Obedience to a leader is clearly demonstrated by imprisoned members of Palestinian terror groups in Post, Sprinzak and Denny’s (2003) interviews. Throughout these interviews, the authors noticed a “stark absence of critical thinking concerning following instructions and carrying out actions” on the behalf of the members. For example, one explained that

The rank and file were ready to follow through fire and water. I was subordinate to just one person. My relations with him were good, as long as I agreed to all that was asked of me. It was an organization with a very clear hierarchy, and it was clear to me that I was at the bottom of the ladder and that I had to do whatever I was told.

Another imprisoned terrorist, from a more secular group, also shows just how pervasive obedience to authority is within these groups. He remarks that “there was no room for questioning” in the organization, and also noted that “the commander got

his orders from his superiors. You couldn't just take the initiative and carry out an armed attack without the commander's approval" (ibid, p.182).

## **Conclusion:**

The process that an individual goes through once part of a terrorist group has been shown in this chapter to result in remarkable changes to the person's behaviour. While being part of such a group "affords a sense of identity and pride" to a member as well as giving them a "life that takes on new meaning" (Valenty, 2004, p.14), it also provides a pathway to destructive and violent behaviour. As examined in the first part of this chapter, the group dynamics within terror organizations allow a process of disinhibition to occur because of the effects of group cohesion, collective decision making and diffusion of responsibility. Linked to group dynamics is the process and resulting consequences of deindividuation. Deindividuation is linked to group dynamics in this instance as it is very much related to the perception of a discernible ingroup/outgroup distinction. Once the ingroup and the outgroup is defined, it may become easier for a person to invest themselves and their identity into that of the group. Though the influence of deindividuation has been questioned, it nonetheless seems to be an important factor in the context of terrorist activities. Aside from group dynamics and the influence of deindividuation, the processes involved in obeying an authority are perhaps some of the most important ways to disinhibit violent behaviour. As demonstrated, obedience to authority can facilitate disinhibition because it can lead to a sense of altered responsibility, which in turn can help to dismiss any fears the person has about the consequences of their action for themselves, as well as justifying violence on the grounds that the individual has an obligation to obey orders. The authorization of violence by a superior has been shown in this chapter to be a substantial force in influencing group members' thoughts and actions. In addition to all of this, the influence of a group upon an individual has also been shown to have a part in facilitating dehumanization, a process that has been referred to throughout this thesis as very important in disinhibiting violent behaviour.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **CONCLUSION**

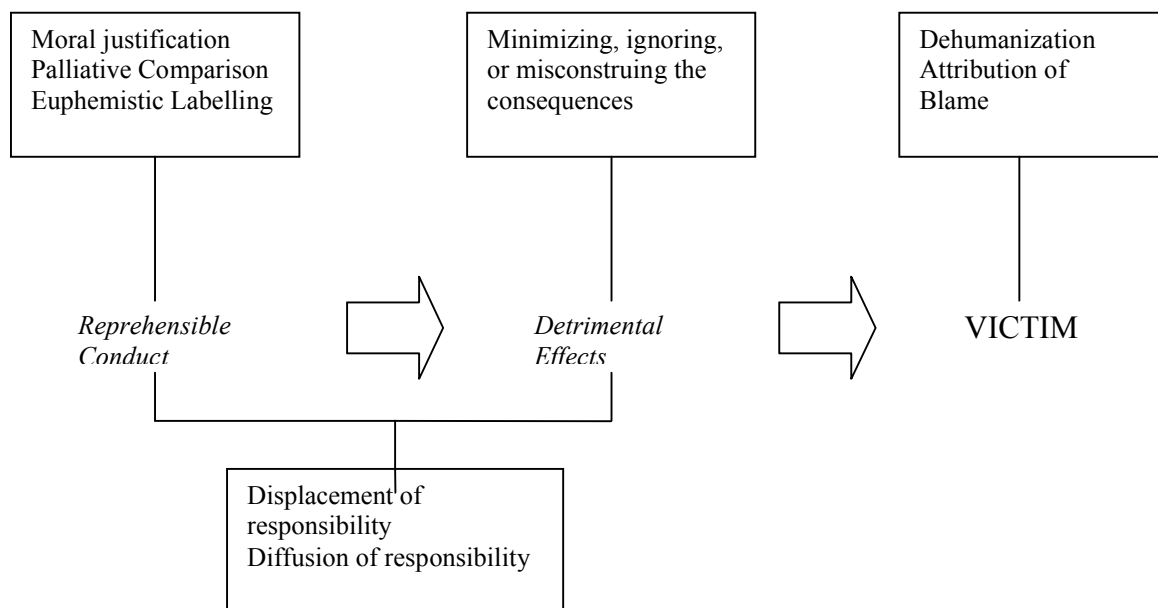
The phenomenon of terrorism has resulted in a horrific amount of suffering, fear and loss of life around the globe. With the resurgence of religious terrorism and an intensification of the use of suicide attacks throughout the world, we have seen more and more frightening examples of the brutality and destructiveness that human beings are capable of. This thesis, by applying a political psychology approach to the study of terrorism, has sought to show many of the ways in which terrorists justify and rationalize their violence, and has argued that disinhibition of behaviour is pertinent to gaining a deeper and more complete insight into the behaviour of terrorists and the psychological processes they undergo in order to commit violence. Through a comprehensive examination of disinhibitory mechanisms in relation to terrorism, it has been demonstrated that the extent to which a potential terrorist surpasses their inhibitions against violence is just as important as understanding his or her motivation for wanting to carry out terrorist activities.

The last chapter in this thesis brings together the most important aspects of chapters three to six in order to work toward building a useful model for understanding the role and significance of disinhibition in terrorism. After a discussion and examination of the model and its relevance to terrorism, the thesis draws to a close with a brief

overview of the implications of this work for the field of the psychology of terrorism, and points out any avenues for further research into the topic of disinhibition and terror.

### **Bandura's Theoretical Model:**

It has been emphasized in this thesis that terrorism must be looked at as a multidimensional phenomenon. Indeed, there are an abundance of factors that often work together to influence a person's decision to become a terrorist and take part in terrorist activities, many of which have been examined throughout different chapters of this work. As such, an appropriate model for demonstrating how disinhibition works in terrorism is one that considers both individual and situational variables, as well as the relation between the two. Bandura's (1990; 2004) model of self-regulating functions and terrorism has already been articulated in chapter two of this thesis, and will also serve as a guide for constructing a model in this chapter.





To reiterate from chapter two, this model clarifies certain disinhibiting mechanisms involved in terrorism, and is adapted from Bandura's earlier work on disinhibition and violence (Bandura, 1986). The model essentially argues that there are eight mechanisms that help lower inhibitions to aggress against others, and that they justify both aggressive behaviour and the effects that the behaviour has on the victims. As such, these eight mechanisms cover both the perpetrator's perception of their victim as well as their perception of the situation.

To begin with, a moral justification may be a necessary disinhibitor for terrorism because it helps to convince those undertaking the violence that what they are doing is indeed the right thing to do, or is perhaps even a duty to do. In this way, construing an act as a moral one can also psychologically enable someone to act on any moral imperatives they may harbour. In addition to moral justification, comparing an act of terror to a greater violent act can also play a role in disinhibiting terrorism as it allows the perpetrator to trivialise their own act of aggression against others. As well as the above two mechanisms, euphemistic labelling of actions and behaviours is also able to push the disinhibition process further because it disguises the true meaning of the language used to describe violence against others. While these three mechanisms are, according to Bandura, used to justify "reprehensible conduct", the main mechanism that follows from these is to play down, misconstrue or even disregard the consequences of any violent actions, which helps to allow perpetrators of violence to rationalize how their violence has affected their victims. Apart from these mechanisms, two others associated with situational disinhibition are diffusion of responsibility and displacement of responsibility. These help in releasing inhibitions as they let the perpetrator believe that responsibility for their violence and its effects ultimately lies with another person or group of people and not just themselves, and can occur in a group situation, often as a result of either group decision making or the presence of a legitimate authority.

The last two mechanisms of disinhibition in this model are linked to the perception of the victim, and have been shown in chapter three of this thesis to be of much significance in terrorism. First is dehumanization, which enables people to believe they are not harming humans but instead something far less important; and second is attribution of blame, where justifications for terrorism are said to come more easily if

the violence is perceived by the perpetrator to be of someone else's, often their victims', making rather than their own.

The model is extremely important for understanding the nature of terrorism because it provides a comprehensive examination of the underlying psychological mechanisms that allow people to participate in terrorist acts. However, while the model devised in this chapter of the thesis is based on the one above, it is comparably different in that it highlights how the dynamics of individual and situational disinhibitors work in with each other to release inhibitions to kill, as well as the way in which disinhibition is related to motivation in the overall process of undertaking a terrorist act.

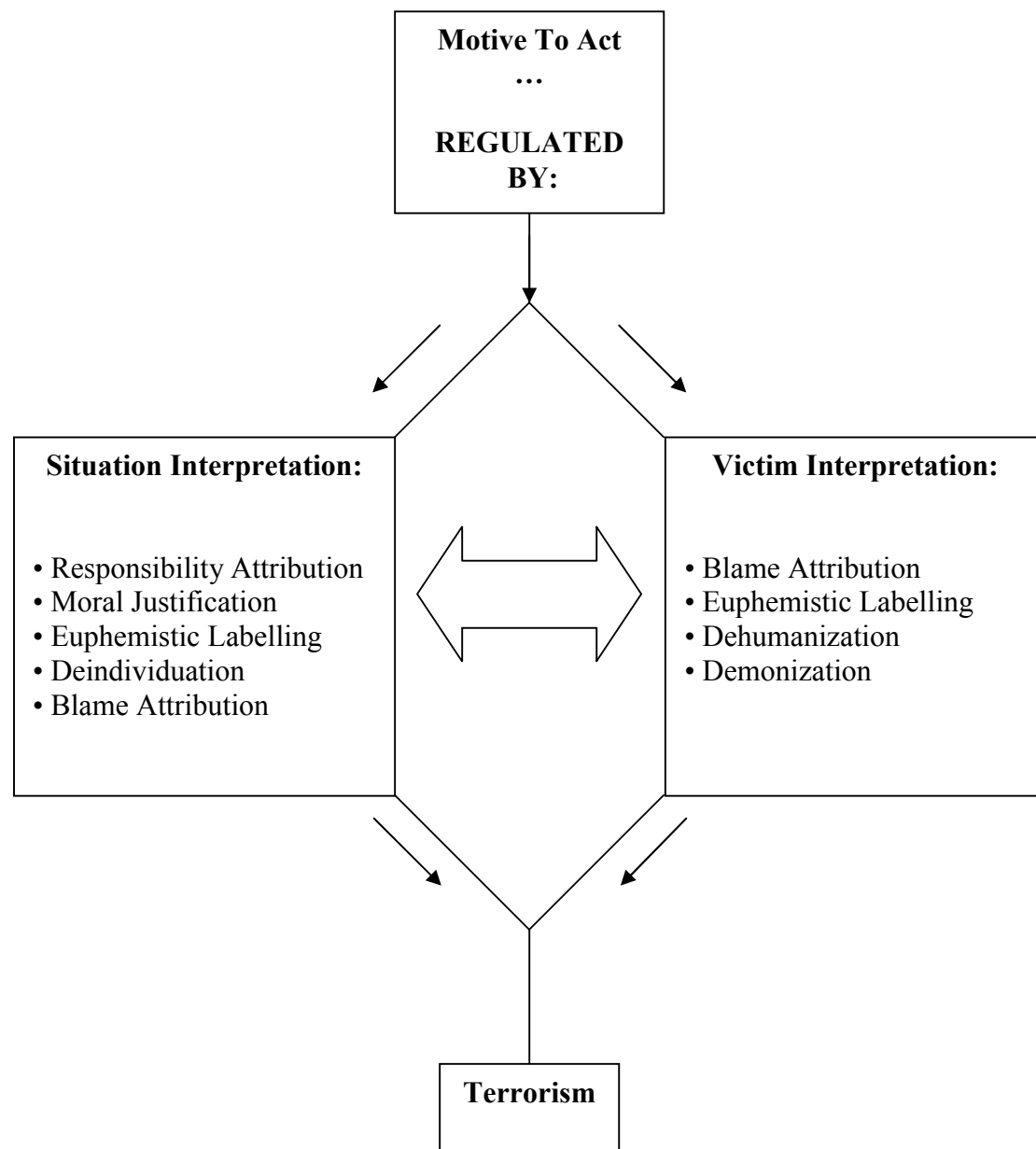
### **Examining Disinhibition in Terrorism – A New Model:**

As described above, the model created in this thesis is interested in looking at both the individual and the situational factors involved in releasing inhibitions for undertaking terrorism as well as the link between these factors. As such, the model is divided into two sections that explain the different disinhibition mechanisms. Because all the elements put forth in the model are highlighted and examined throughout the chapters in this thesis, an explanation of the model will include a discussion of all the main points made in each of the chapters so that a coherent conclusion to this work can be clearly articulated. Essentially, the model seeks to demonstrate that the self-regulation process is vital to understanding how someone with a motivation to harm others is actually enabled to do so through certain psychological processes. It sees the disinhibition process as containing two parts; one being the way in which the terrorist interprets the situation, and the other the way in which he or she interprets the individual(s) they are attacking.

After the following explanation of the model, the research questions that have guided this thesis, as outlined in chapter one, will have been clearly answered. To reiterate, these questions are: firstly, and most importantly, what mechanisms exist that allow a person to knowingly inflict acts of terrorism upon another person; and secondly, to

what extent is disinhibition an important factor in the psychology of terrorism as a field of research?

*Figure 2: The Disinhibition Process*



As illustrated in the model, the process of disinhibition has two distinct parts – how a person interprets the situation, and how he or she perceives their intended victim(s). The double-headed arrow between the two parts shows that they are inextricably linked to each other and interact so that a person comes to feel justified about their behaviour, its effects, and about harming the particular victims they have chosen to attack. It should also be noted that these processes often occur at the same time rather than separately. Once self-regulations are lowered, the person then becomes psychologically enabled to partake in the violence that they were previously motivated toward participating in. While some mechanisms come into play as a result of one or two others being present, this does not mean that all the mechanisms in the above model are required to be present for disinhibited behaviour to occur. Indeed, sometimes only two or three may be necessary for a person to lose certain inhibitions. As such, the above model is not arguing that all of its mechanisms must be present for terrorism to occur, but rather that disinhibited behaviour will often occur as a result of a combination of some or all of them. In positing this, though, it must also be noted that a potential terrorist must be disinhibited in both the situational sense as well as in his or her perception of the victim(s) to be psychologically enabled to participate in terrorism. Examined below are the two parts of the model that make up the bulk of the thesis – the interpretation of the situation, and the interpretation of the victim(s).

### *(1) Perception of the Situation*

#### *(a) Responsibility Attribution:*

Where a person attributes responsibility for their actions has been discussed in several chapters of this thesis as an important disinhibitor for engaging in terrorism. For instance, in chapter five of this thesis it was noted that diffusion of responsibility can often help release inhibitions to kill because responsibility for the act and its consequences can be twisted by the perpetrator into being attributed to a religious deity; for example, “I am doing God’s work for him” (Beck, 2002) and “it is Allah who selects the martyrs” (Hassan, 2001). Responsibility attribution, either through displacement or diffusion, was shown most clearly in the sixth chapter of this thesis. In a group situation, diffusion of responsibility was shown to be relatively easily employed as a result of group dynamics and especially group decision making.

Displacement of responsibility was also shown in this chapter, primarily within the obedience to authority section, where it was argued that the mechanism comes into play most easily whenever a clear authority situation exists – in this way, a person can feel free from guilt about harming others as the ultimate responsibility for the violence is perceived by the perpetrator as lying with an established authority rather than with him or her self.

(b) Moral Justification:

Reframing or perceiving acts of terrorism as morally justifiable has been shown in previous theory and in virtually all chapters throughout this thesis as a significant method for disinhibition. Put simply, viewing an action as morally permissible is able to help potential terrorists lower their inhibitions by, for instance, helping them to absolve feelings of guilt for any actions they undertake. In many instances, it is cultural and/or religious sanctioning that can give rise to such moral justifications for violence, most often through education, socialization, and interpretations of cultural or religious practices and beliefs.

(c) Euphemistic Labelling:

Distorting the meaning of people, concepts, and actions is imperative in understanding how terrorists are psychologically enabled to harm others. While this was referred to in different sections of the thesis, it was more clearly elucidated in the third chapter, mostly in relation to dehumanization. For example, it was noted in this particular chapter that euphemisms can help to justify an action as they aid in psychologically blocking out any moral disgust or confusion that the proper word may have aroused. Euphemisms revolving around terrorism that can serve to justify it in certain situations are usually noted to involve terrorists invoking the popular cliché “freedom fighter” as their title, which can then serve not only to justify the situation they are in as terrorists, but also to morally justify the actions such a person may then undertake.

(d) Deindividuation:

The dynamics that being in a group often produces can have a significant effect on disinhibiting different types of behaviours. As described in the sixth chapter, deindividuation is especially applicable to terrorism, and was discussed as being able

to allow people to perceive others in terms of being part of a larger group rather than individuals, so that they come to be seen as a one-dimensional 'other' rather than multi-dimensional human beings. Deindividuation is also very important in the disinhibition process because it allows those undertaking violence, whether it be in a small or large group, to feel more anonymous as attackers and therefore have less concern over their behaviour. Thus, it provides a reasonably easy avenue for people to exhibit behaviours they normally would not display had they not been in a group situation.

(e) Blame Attribution:

Attributing blame for terrorism by a perpetrator away from themselves and onto others has also been explained as important for the process of disinhibition to take place. While displacing blame for terrorism is also articulated in the 'victim perception' section in this chapter, it also needs to be mentioned in the situational context because of the effect that blaming the situation can have on the disinhibition process. In this way, it is very similar to displacement of responsibility, and can often come to the fore in group situations. In chapter three of the thesis, it was noted that blaming others for acts of terrorism is perhaps one of the most important ways of removing inhibitions to kill, as guilt for violence is often viewed as not necessary when the blame for it can be laid elsewhere. A good example of this is one from the IRA, used in chapter three, where a bombing by the organization that killed a number of civilians was blamed by IRA leadership on the British Army, who they alleged had set off the bomb prematurely. Another example that can often be found is when terrorists claim that their violence is in reaction to a previous action directed against them by their 'enemy'.

*(2) Perception of the Victim*

(a) Blame Attribution:

The third chapter of this thesis demonstrated that perceiving one's victim as deserving of their situation is a startlingly easy way to overcome feelings of empathy for them. This was clearly shown through examples of both the IRA and Palestinian suicide bombers, one important example being the seemingly general belief among

Palestinian terrorists that because of the “kind of conduct” they believe they are subjected to by Israelis renders no other option than to undertake terror against them (Post, Sprinzak and Denny, 2003). Attributing blame to victims for actions taken against them may derive from cultural or religious teachings, in which people may interpret, distort, or misconstrue certain beliefs about particular ‘enemies’ of that society and/or religious orientation.

(b) Euphemistic Labelling:

Using euphemistic language to describe a victim in addition to perceiving a situation also significantly aids the disinhibition process, especially in terms of dehumanizing the enemy. For instance, this thesis used the example of employing different metaphors in describing victims of potential violence to show how euphemisms are linked to dehumanization of the enemy – describing the enemy as people who need to be “exterminated”, for example, thus aids in further dehumanizing them as it employs terms usually used to describe rodents or other pest-like animals while essentially denying their humanness.

(c) Dehumanization:

As detailed throughout this thesis, dehumanization is one of the most important avenues for disinhibiting terrorists to attack and kill others as it allows the terrorist to view others as inhuman, thereby helping him or her to lose normal moral restraint if or when harming them. A pertinent example of dehumanization can be seen in one of the examples put forth in the case of Palestinian suicide bombers, where one suicide bomber, referring to his would-be Israeli victims, wrote in his will that his suicide attack was carried out in order to “take revenge upon the sons of monkeys and the pigs, the Zionist infidels and the enemies of humanity” (Brooks, 2002). Cultural processes can also help in furthering along a process of dehumanizing others. For instance, education, socialization, and other cultural practices are in some situations able to entrench and sanction dehumanized views of other individuals and groups of people, while in other cases the beliefs and messages that cultural myths and ideologies convey may be distorted and misinterpreted by some people so that ‘others’ from outside the culture come to be seen in a dehumanized manner. An illustration of the above can be seen in the examples provided by the Palestinian case in chapter four. As discussed in chapter three, the root of dehumanization often lies in

a lack of empathy for particular people. This lack of empathy can arise due to a variety of factors, as explained, however it can also be further heightened by group dynamics, especially through a manipulation of ingroup-outgroup distinctions. In this way, the more an ingroup perceives an outgroup as distinctly different to themselves, the less likely the ingroup are to develop feelings of empathy toward them.

(d) Demonization:

Linked to dehumanization, demonization has been shown to be significant in the disinhibition process because it helps people to view others as starkly different to themselves and other good, normal human beings. Noted predominantly in the fifth chapter, demonization is often able to come to fruition through different interpretations of religious teachings. Although different from dehumanization in that it sees victims not as animals or beasts but as representations of wickedness and symbols of evil, demonization is still an important disinhibitor as it has the same effect as dehumanization on the way in which a persons inhibitions are lowered or removed.

*Patrick Magee: A Case In Point:*

In order to show how the disinhibition process works, and how the mechanisms work together, a pertinent example can be found in Patrick Magee, better known as the IRA's 'Brighton Bomber' of 1984. Magee was convicted of both planting and exploding the bomb that was meant to blow up the British Conservative Party's conference in Brighton in October of 1984. Magee had planted the bomb 24 days prior to the blast, setting it with a timing device. When it detonated, the bomb killed five people and injured 34 others (McDonald, 2004). Instead of just killing members of the Conservative Party, three of those killed were wives of Ministers attending the conference. In subsequent interviews with Magee in the years following his arrest and later release from jail, much insight can be gained about the role that differing disinhibitors played in his decision to carry out this act against his 'enemies'. For instance, Magee has remarked that one of the reasons he joined the IRA in the first place was that he felt morally justified in doing so – as he felt he “couldn't just stand



there and do nothing” (“The Age of Terror”, 2003) while his fellow countrymen, as he perceived it, were being unjustly attacked.

Aside from feeling morally justified in taking part in terrorism, Magee also displayed a distinct lack of empathy for his victims, at times bordering on dehumanizing them. It has been noted in the past that while he was “concerned not to kill or injure any of the staff” at the Brighton hotel, he remained unconcerned about the relatives of those attending the hotel’s conference: “at the time I would have seen them as part of the political establishment. Now I see them as innocents and I can’t justify that” (McDonald, 2004). On top of this, Magee also states that he saw those he classed as enemies as a collective “faceless enemy”, and noted that at the time “you’re seeing the uniform or you’re seeing the political allegiances” rather than the individual people themselves (“The Age of Terror”, 2003). Psychological distance between perpetrator and victim is also evident in Magee’s explanations of the Brighton bombing, as he mentions that he was not “aware” of the fact that people were actually injured or killed as a result of his actions (ibid). Interestingly, the effect of belonging to a culture that sanctions political violence can also be seen in the case of Magee, as he is very clear to point out that when he joined the IRA, the cultural atmosphere at the time was such that it seemed the “most natural thing in the world to join” the organization (ibid).

From this brief case study, it can be seen that Magee was uninhibited in several different ways, and that some of the mechanisms evident in his discussion of justifying terrorism served to feed off each other. For example, his moral justification about joining the organization, fed in part from the cultural sanctioning of the IRA, led to Magee believing there was a moral justification for undertaking the Brighton bombing, which perhaps in turn allowed him to hold a marked lack for empathy for particular victims at the time. This lack of empathy was then able to help him see his victims in a dehumanized and deindividuated manner – as “faceless” and as part of a larger group rather than as individuals. In sum, from this one case alone it is clear that disinhibition, and not just motivation, plays an important role in terrorism, as Magee’s perceptions of both the situation and his victims were able to lower his inhibitions and psychologically allow him to undertake his now infamous terrorist act.

## **Concluding Remarks: Implications of the Thesis and Avenues for Further Research:**

As this thesis has argued throughout, more attention needs to be paid to understanding the psychological mechanisms that lower or weaken a person's inhibitions against terrorism and political violence. This work has shown that these mechanisms are crucial in uncovering the process behind how people are able to kill other human beings, and as such, one of the main implications of this thesis is that researching into disinhibition as an important part of understanding terrorism requires much more attention from political psychology experts. Once this part of terrorism is explained, it may then become easier to paint a more complete picture of the path to terrorism as a whole. By researching in greater depth the conclusions and theoretical concepts discussed in this thesis, knowledge on the relationship of disinhibition to terrorism can be more fully recognised by those seeking to understand it. In light of this, this thesis has also noted that the significance of both situational and individual contexts of terrorism are equally as important, and that more time should be invested in better explaining how they work and interact together.

Linked to this, another implication of this thesis has to do with the relationship of disinhibition and terror to counter-terrorism. Indeed, while the psychology of terrorism as a whole can provide insights into more effective counter-terrorism strategies (Crenshaw, 1990; 2000), understanding how disinhibition itself relates directly to terrorism also has the ability to help determine better counter-terror initiatives. For example, a greater understanding of how the psychological processes involved in the disinhibition of terrorism are cultivated and maintained may be able to help provide information on how to stop or reverse such powerful mechanisms of disinhibition as dehumanization. As Bjorgo (2005) explains, "we need insights into the conditions and the processes leading up to terrorist atrocities if we are to identify possible avenues of prevention, early intervention, or ways of breaking the vicious circle of terrorist revenge and counter-revenge" (p.261). In other words, realising the power of inhibitors and disinhibitors can give the policy-maker another perspective from which to view terrorism and terrorist groups. For instance, a number of scholars

have noted that deterring potential terrorists from entering terror groups in the first place should be one of the major goals of a counter-terrorist policy (Borum, 2004; Post, 2005a, Stevenson, 2004). An understanding of disinhibition comes directly into play in the achievement of this tactic, as knowledge about how cultural and religious sanctioning of terrorism works in different societies can serve in many cases to prevent such a situation from occurring. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular, cultural sanctioning and the attached moral justification of terror seems to be one of the main disinhibitors of terrorism (Post, 2005a). As such, policies undertaken by governments or even non-governmental organizations to counter such sanctioning could result in fewer people choosing the life of a terrorist.

While a comprehensive understanding of how disinhibition impacts terrorism can potentially help in stopping terrorism before it begins, it can, in conjunction with other knowledge on such issues as motivation for terror, also help to curb terrorism if it is either too late for the above tactic to come into play or the policy is unsuccessful. For instance, knowledge of disinhibiting mechanisms can provide insights into how terrorists and terrorist groups perceive the world around them, their enemies, and how they are able to actually go through with harming others. As such, disinhibition helps us address the process of terrorism, as well as dealing with the root causes of it rather than just its symptoms. Indeed, as Sinai (2005) notes, understanding the processes and root causes involved in terror helps in countering terrorist groups because it aids in predicting what kind of target a particular group is aiming to attack as well as the “degree of lethality in its warfare” (p.217).

As was noted in the example of Patrick Magee, it can be seen that while he was motivated by various political grievances, it was the disinhibition process that allowed him to see through his motivation and undertake his bombing attack. In other words, an understanding of disinhibition shows us that while motivations of terrorism need to be addressed and fixed, the inhibitions that keep violence in place are also in dire need of being addressed if a counter-terrorism policy is to fully eradicate, or at the very least curtail, particular terrorists and terrorist groups.

From the above implications, it is clear that this thesis is able to provide avenues for further research into the psychology of terrorism. For example, in order to lend more

validity to the conclusions of this work, different terrorist groups could be applied to the same theoretical framework articulated here. As well as this, perhaps the one of the most important implications of this thesis is that further research should focus more on an examination into the relationship between motivation and disinhibition for terrorists. In other words, research should be undertaken to see how motivators and disinhibiting mechanisms interact with each other, especially within cultural and religious contexts, so the two can be better differentiated and explained. Aside from these two possible avenues for further research, one other very important avenue should look at an examination of counter-terrorism in light of what this study on disinhibition has uncovered, as disinhibition helps to explain many of the psychological underpinnings in relation to how terrorism gradually becomes justified in the eyes of the terrorist.

However, perhaps the most important avenue for further research lies in applying and correcting the problems and obstacles this thesis has run into. For instance, earlier in this thesis it was mentioned that a lack of firsthand information regarding the illustrative cases may be remedied using a process of interviewing rather than relying on information already in existence. While it was noted that interviewing was unrealistic for this thesis, further research including such interviewing should be an option for future, more detailed work in this area. Following from this, it may, as noted, lend more external validity to further research if more than two illustrative cases are studied, as a wider and more complete picture of terrorists and different terrorist groups may be able to be gained.

As well as this, further research should also seek to work on the problems that can be found in the model this thesis has built. For example, further research may be able to unearth more disinhibitory mechanisms or discover new ways from which to understand the disinhibition process so that a better model can be created that more fully demonstrates the relationship between mechanisms and how they interact so as to push disinhibition as a process further along. In addition, it may be pertinent to research deeper into the psychological effects of culture and religion. Although chapters four and five articulated how culture and religion fit into the process of disinhibition in terrorism, perhaps more research is still needed on these topics to

provide a better explanation of how they fit in with other disinhibiting mechanisms, and how important they truly are in the disinhibition process as a whole.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the role that disinhibition plays in enabling terrorism is one that should not be underestimated by researchers studying the psychology of terrorism. Through an examination of this concept and its relation to terrorism, it has been shown that disinhibition is an extremely significant part of understanding terrorism as a whole, and that there are numerous disinhibitory mechanisms which both work together and feed off each other that help to enable potential terrorists to become actual terrorists. Of these mechanisms, perhaps dehumanization and attribution of blame are the most recognized; however this thesis has brought together many other just as important mechanisms, such as cultural sanctioning, demonization, and mechanisms that come into play in group situations. It nearly goes without saying that terrorism is a problem that has plagued and will continue to plague our entire world, having already horrifically affected an infinite amount of people from all across the globe. As such, it is only with a complete understanding of all the facets of terrorism – including the psychological aspects examined here – that this problem can be slowly eliminated. Thus, this thesis has been an attempt to start or inspire a process of in-depth inquiry into the theoretical underpinnings of terrorist psychology in the hopes that the problem of terrorism may have a better chance at being more effectively dealt with by those who seek to understand and counter it.

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